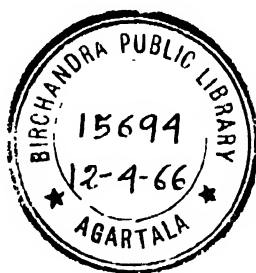


By the same author

MEDAL FROM PAMPLONA

Tangier Assignment

CAMERON ROUGVIE



ARTHUR BARKER LIMITED
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In Tangier's heyday, few could ever distinguish fact from fiction; but no such problem arises herein, for the incidents and persons described are fictitious.

Chapter I

I baited the three hooks with salt pork and threw the hand-line over the side. When I had paid out thirty feet, I settled down behind the bulwarks in the shade of the deck-house. No one aboard the tub had gloves to lend me, so I wrapped dirty rags around my fingers and palms. It might save me from cord-burns, if I got a strike. I did not have to wedge myself in, for the sea was moderating.

Three Rolls Royce Merlins are greedy, and to save fuel we were drifting with the swell and wind to the southeast. Astern, I could see Mount Guardia dei Turchi, at 820 feet, on the island of Ustica, about twenty miles off. Palermo was thirty-seven miles farther astern, and Naples one hundred and thirty miles to starboard.

Four hours ago, we had eaten curried bully beef and stewed prunes. It was not my idea of an adequate meal. In fact, none of the creature comforts were adequate aboard this ex-Royal Navy Motor Torpedo Boat. My bunk was soaked, and my clothes stank. I had not bathed properly for three days, since we were each rationed to a gallon of fresh water daily for all purposes. When the Fairmile, a larger and slower ex-Royal Navy patrol craft, cast off our tow-line two nights ago during the storm, we had been parted from our only plentiful supply of fresh water. A salt water bathe is refreshing, but it leaves an irritating film on the skin. I sipped some harsh Moroccan red wine and lit an American cigarette. At least we had enough of them: more than one and a half million.

What made it worse was that I was here of my own choice. When I had signed articles several days ago, it was not as some

bum on the Tangier beach but as an occasional British intelligence agent, persuaded to accept a new assignment. Fortunately, I ran few risks. The smugglers accepted me, really believing I was gathering material for a film script and nothing more. Danger from Italian patrol boats was slight, for we were five knots faster than their maximum of twenty-five. But the discomfort annoyed me.

I had selected this position near the deck-house, so that I could hear the skipper radioing the Fairmile. Since lunch, he had been trying unsuccessfully every hour on the hour. It meant nothing, for he and the other skipper were indifferent wireless operators. Nor was it likely that the Italian customs had captured the Fairmile. They remained in port during rough weather, but would soon be on patrol again because these were prime smuggling waters. They would know, moreover, from their informers in Tangier that the two boats might be in the area with more than six million cigarettes.

I let out more line, tugged my visored cap farther down to protect my peeling nose, and scratched.

'What do you think you're doing, Belcourt?' asked a voice.

I looked up at Joe Lesnick, the other seaman aboard and a fellow Canadian. 'I'm browned off with bully, Joe. Look, why don't you call me Robert like everyone else?'

'You greenhorns slay me, Belcourt. I've never seen fish caught out here on a hand-line. Anyway, what's wrong with bully? You haven't eaten enough yet to get sick of it.'

I tried again, grinning. 'Hell, Joe, I've probably eaten more bully than you've ever seen.'

'Balls!' he sneered. 'Where did you eat bully? It's not the corned beef or pastrami you know. It's men's grub.'

'I ate little else when I was in the war over there,' I said, pointing in the direction of the Italian mainland.

'What were you in?'

'The infantry.'

'And, of course, you were at Dieppe too?'

'No.'

'Well, Belcourt, you're the first Canadian soldier I've ever met who wasn't.'

I was getting annoyed. 'What would you know about it? You're too bloody young.'

'I made the air force by the end of the war.'

'Hell, I probably spent more time on sick parade than you spent square-bashing.'

'Yeah, I imagine you'd malingering something fierce to get out of the front line.'

That did it. 'How would a Hunkie learn a word like malingering?'

'As you did, you frog bastard!' he spat back.

I got up fast, but he was on top of me. He caught me with a hard one on the forehead, throwing me back against the deck-house. My taunt about his Ukrainian background had so enraged him he fought savagely but unskilfully. I took a couple more on the face before I could fend one of his wild blows off on to the deck-house. It hurt him, but he still flailed away with his other fist. We were the same height, five feet, ten inches, but I weighed twenty pounds more than his 165 and was stronger. I closed with him and went for his guts. When he sagged, I threw him over the side.

'That should cool you off,' I grunted, as I helped him aboard. I stood back warily, but the fight was out of him.

Before he went below, he scowled at me. 'We'll finish this ashore.'

'Any time,' I grinned, sure he would have to be very drunk or angry to try it again. I resumed fishing. In five minutes, at six o'clock, the skipper would try again to contact the Fairmile. Meanwhile, my thoughts skipped back to London, three weeks ago . . .

I had been summoned by Stuart Grant, the senior official of British intelligence, who ran me on a part-time basis. During the war, I had commanded an infantry company as a captain and had been seconded to British intelligence after I had suffered a burst ear drum, making me unfit for further combat. Since I

spoke French, Spanish, German, and Italian – facts I had concealed when I joined up – I solicited the posting to intelligence. It came through immediately, and I spent the rest of the war working under Grant in Gibraltar.

At the end of the war eleven years ago, I stayed on in England as a journalist, later switching to film publicity. Now I was in both the production of films and script-writing. On leaving the army, I had accepted Grant's glamorous proposal to remain on call for certain 'intelligence assignments', but these had proved mainly police work. Over the years, I had occasionally refused to play the role of a common informer, and some of our interviews had degenerated into acrimony. Eventually, during a rancorous meeting a year ago, he had flared up, spouting about patriotism and duty. I had laughed and been ushered out and not heard from him since.

Now, on entering his office, I was greeted as though nothing had changed between us.

'You're looking fit, Robert. Film-making must agree with you.'

He continued briefly in this vein, then gave me news of some of our wartime comrades. I was silent, eventually breaking with: 'O.K., cut the crap. What do you want?'

He struggled with his temper and face. 'You always were a byword for charm, Robert. But you're quite right; I do have something for you.'

'I'm leaving the country for three months,' I said, 'and I've no intention . . .'

'I know all about it,' he interrupted, waving a newspaper clipping. 'This gossip columnist says you're going to Tangier to combine a holiday with research for a script on cigarette smuggling. That's right, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

'Fine. You can do one or two things for us out there, and it won't threaten your few principles.'

'One or two things, eh? Well, I might be interested, provided you kick in five hundred pounds towards my expenses.'

'That might be arranged.'

'I'll be damned! It's that important, is it?'

He nodded. 'Can I take it you're on?'

'It's possible . . . Suppose you tell me more?'

He got up and started to pour drinks. 'Your job is in two parts. The first you can do standing on your head. We want full information on the contraband racket, which is what you're going for.'

Pausing, he handed me a drink, then continued: 'How do you propose to do it?'

'Pick a few brains and pay them, if necessary. How else?'

'That won't do at all. You'll have to get a job on one of the boats.'

I snorted: 'You can go to hell! Nothing'll get me on one of those dirty tubs, certainly not five hundred quid. I can get all the information I want ashore.'

'Maybe. But not all I want.'

'Such as?'

He leaned back in his chair. 'The Algerian Moslems are rebelling against France. They're getting arms from outside, and we want to know whether they're coming in on any Tangier contrabanders flying the British flag or whether any of them are planning to run guns. We'd have a helluva mess with France if they caught one, so we want to stop it before it starts. We're convinced the only way you'll get the information is by working aboard one of the boats.'

'All right, I can see that. But I'm not interested in being nicked by the Italians.'

'Don't worry. We'll get you aboard a boat that's five knots faster than any Italian customs boat.'

'And if the engines break down while we're being chased?'

'I can't guarantee everything, but we can probably get you out of jail. If we don't, you'll still have five hundred pounds tax free and material for another script.'

I laughed. 'Up your ass, chum! I'll probably get a year, and I clear a damned sight more in a year than a lousy five hundred.'

'I said we can probably get you out. Anyway, the chances are slim that you'll be caught. Well?'

I got up and freshened my drink. 'You may be right. I know the contrabanders are using ex-R.N. torpedo boats. Is that what you have in mind?'

He nodded. 'Actually, they're only using one ex-M. T. B., but we'll get you on it. The skipper, by the way, is an ex-M. T. B. wartime officer.'

'Getting better every minute, dad. What exactly do you want me to find out?'

'Everything: who finances the show; where they operate; their radio codes; their shore organization in Sicily and Italy; how closely they're tied in with the Mafia.'

'The Mafia!' I snorted. 'Aren't you reading too many thrillers?'

'If that's your attitude, your research stinks. The Mafia handles the distribution of cigarettes in Italy and Sicily.'

'This seems like police work, which is where I went out a year ago.'

'It's a lot more important than that. We want to know whether the Mafia tie-up has anything to do with drug smuggling out of Italy. Those contraband boys may be doing a two-way job: cigarettes into Italy and drugs out. The Mafia ships drugs from Italy to the U.S., but no one can ever determine all the routes. This might be one of them.'

Laughing, I asked: 'You expect me to find out all that in a few trips?'

'Of course not. But we want leads on Algerian gun-running and Mafia drug routes, if any. We'll put a horde of men on to your leads.'

↗ 'It's a tall order. Why me? You've got professionals.'

He shrugged. 'They've got nowhere. You're new; you're above suspicion. We think we can get you aboard the boat, and you've got the experience – yachting as well as intelligence – to pull it off. Or at least we think so.'

'Some of it's still police work. And I've had enough of being your stool pigeon.'

'The rest isn't.'

'Ah, there's more, is there?'

He poured himself another drink, then looked at me fixedly. 'You're bloody right there is. There's a Russian resident, or spy master, in Tangier, and we want him. We want to penetrate his network – perhaps even run him, if we can.'

This was more like the peacetime espionage that appealed to my juvenile streak of romanticism. Actually, I should have known better years ago, for routine intelligence is prosaic and plodding, with one case in a thousand exciting and interesting. Grant, had coupled the assignments, knowing I might refuse the policeman's task, but jump at the other. He was right: to find a communist spy master, I would act as a stool pigeon.

'Who is he?' I asked.

'We don't know. We've intercepted messages carried by a courier from him to two of his agents in Gib. We know the agents and the courier, but we can't trace the courier back to the resident. They've a simple system: when the Spanish closed their consulate in Gib two years ago, British subjects had to get their Spanish visas either from London or Tangier. For a small fee, the Russian courier, a steward on the Tangier-Gib ferry, gets the visas. He also takes orders for things in Tangier that are unavailable in Gib, such as French cheese and good meat.

'The steward doesn't go ashore in Tangier, because the ferry stays there briefly before returning to Gib. But he gives the passports and purchase orders to an accomplice on the quay-side and takes delivery the following day. During the month we've followed the accomplice, he's visited a hundred business premises, to say nothing of flats and homes. But we're still no closer to the resident.'

I sat forward in my seat. 'Surely you can eliminate most of those he visits infrequently. You've penetrated the net or you wouldn't have the intercepts. I'd guess one of the Gib agents is your boy. You know when he gets his orders from the resident

and can check back on the places the Tangier courier visited the previous day.'

He shrugged: 'Even if you're correct, it won't work. He must go regularly to twenty-five places daily, and we haven't been able to eliminate any of them yet.'

'What about the intercepts? You must have something out of them that would eliminate a few.'

'No, but you're improving. The intercepts go to one agent in Gib, who keeps his own and relays the others. One lot are in idiomatic English, the other in passable Spanish, but as an English-speaking person would use the language. So we think the resident is British or American. Philologists have come up as well with this interpretation.'

'Why couldn't he be a Frenchman, who was educated in England and learned Spanish here?'

'No, he'd still write Spanish with a French twist, according to the experts. Here's something for you: it's one of the intercepts in English. We can get most of the implications except the soup recipe.'

I read the photostatic copy of a typewritten letter:

DEAR DICK,

WE HAVE NOT RECEIVED THE GOODS YET, SO WE CANNOT SEND YOU YOUR COMMISSION. GET THE SHIPPER TO EXPEDITE IMMEDIATELY.

DO NOT FORGET ROTA AS A GOOD MARKET FOR OUR PRODUCTS. GET ONTO FINDING CONTACTS THERE. YOU SHOULD MEET ENOUGH OF THEM IN GIB.

WHAT IS YOUR DECISION ON THE DEAL WE TALKED ABOUT - SENDING US CAVIAR, WHICH THE RUSSIAN WHALING FLEETS BRING TO GIB? YOU SHOULD DO WELL, BECAUSE THERE IS A MARKET FOR IT HERE.

GIVE MIKE THIS RECIPE FOR GAZPACHO. HE HAS BEEN AFTER IT FOR A LONG TIME.

$\frac{3}{4}$ KILO TOMATOES, 4 MEDIUM GREEN PEPPERS, $\frac{1}{2}$ K. MOISTENED BREAD, 2 SMALL CLOVES GARLIC, 2 OUNCES

OLIVE OIL. CRUSH ALL IN MORTAR. LATER ADD A CUCUMBER CUT IN SMALL PIECES, AND SALT, VINEGAR, AND WATER, TO TASTE.

TELL MIKE THE ONLY CATCH HERE IS GETTING THE CUKES. IN OUR GARDEN, THEY ARE NOT RIPE YET, AND THERE ARE STILL TOO MANY WASPS ABOUT. IN A COUPLE OF MONTHS, IT SHOULD BE ALL RIGHT WHEN THERE ARE FEWER WASPS.

BEST WISHES,
RENÉ.

I looked up at him. 'Peculiar typewriter, that. What make is it?'

He shrugged. 'We don't know.'

'What!'

'That's right: we don't bloody well know! It hasn't the standard keyboard of upper and lower case letters; they're all upper case. The best guess is that it's a child's toy. And, furthermore, the crafty sod has used three machines to type the messages we've intercepted.'

He paused to light a cigarette, then continued: 'What do you make of the letter?'

'I wouldn't spoil your fun; you tell me. But Dick certainly isn't your boy, nor is Mike.'

Taking the letter from me, he said: 'I'll give you our interpretation: René is one of the cover names of the resident, and Dick, an agent in Gib. Dick is told to comply with some urgent request for action or he won't get paid. Rota is a naval base the Yanks have near Cadiz. René is suggesting that Dick make contacts with Americans from Rota who go to Gib. Caviar is probably messages carried by couriers on the Russian whaling fleets, which stop at Gib, and René may want Dick to act as a letter-drop there. The recipe is probably an order for another agent, Mike. Each vegetable may be a code word. For example, tomatoes may be miniature cameras. We can't make anything of the last paragraph. Everything hinges on the word cucumber, but wasps could be someone's counter intelligence agents.'

I studied him, but he seemed genuinely puzzled. Yet that last paragraph was a bombshell. If my interpretation were correct, René was using American slang. Was the spy master trying to get at nuclear weapons (cukes for nukes) on the American air bases in Morocco (our garden) and had he been prevented up to now by security men (wasps)? Did he intend to blow up a few cubic miles of newly-independent Morocco, when he had infiltrated the base (in a couple of months) with a non-wasp, or traitorous security man?

I decided to keep my interpretation to myself, though this was against all intelligence tenets. Probably, the only reason was my perversity in dealing with Grant. But even if he were aware of the interpretation, it might not benefit me now to disclose my knowledge. How it might help, I could not determine. As usual, he had given me a minimum of information, but for once, I might be ahead of him.

'Do the philologists,' I asked, 'think an American or an Englishman wrote that?'

'They say it could be either.'

'Why was it sent in clear?'

'They still send a lot of allusive messages; it doesn't give anything important away. In that one, we can make some good guesses, but that's all they are. As for the message to Mike, we think he's a contraband seaman – you'll hear about him in Gib – and he can't carry one-time pads or any other encoding and decoding apparatus. A crewman is limited in his personal belongings and has little privacy aboard those boats. Now, do you still want the job?'

'I'll take it.'

'There's one more thing.' He paused, staring at me.

'Come on, let's have it.'

He started drumming on his desk and tried what he thought was a paternal smile. 'When you get on to the job of uncovering the spy master, we're going to send you an assistant.'

'Do I have a chance to approve of him?'

'It's a she, and you don't.'

'I see . . . Attractive?'

'Yes, that brings up the problem.'

'What problem?'

'She doesn't approve of you. I had to brief her on you, and she was quite appalled at what I told her.'

'Just what did you tell her?'

'Facts. It's rather a black picture, even painted in moderation.'

'Thanks. Then I don't get to lay her?'

He scowled. 'Let's keep it above the belt! She will go out there as your secretary. Presumably, you're going to rent a house or flat, and she will live with you. I strongly recommend separate bedrooms and no caveman techniques. She's a first class agent, and you can detail her to do anything that will help you uncover the spy master.'

'Anything?'

'Yes.'

'Spell it out for me, chum. I'm trying to keep it above the belt.'

'All right, Robert. By anything, I mean you can tell her to go to bed with the man you eventually decide is the spy master. That is, if you think it would advance my scheme to use him.'

'Tell me more. I've no experience in pimping.'

'That's quite enough,' he rasped. 'She's a damned decent girl. She understands the situation and will do what you tell her, but neither she nor I have to put up with your filth.'

'O.K then, it's not pimping; it's patriotism. Everything's relative. What's her name?'

He paused. 'Sandra Grant.'

'Any relation?'

'Yes, my niece.'

'Good Christ almighty, and you painted me black!'

'Look, Robert, I know you're a womanizer. Fair enough. I don't approve, but that's your business. You're also a tough, resourceful agent. One of the best I have, actually. I think Sandra

can help you on this job. She's experienced, clever, and brave – and tough, too. But she is a young, attractive woman, and I want to rely on you to protect her, if the going gets rough.'

In all the years I had known him, these were the first compliments he had paid me. The flattery, however, failed to warm me. On the contrary, I despised him for involving his own niece in a dirty, dangerous intrigue.

He probably read my thoughts, for he shrugged. 'I hope to use the spy master. To cover all contingencies, I decided to send a woman agent with you, and she's one of the best. She probably knows Tangier better than you do and speaks French, Spanish, and Arabic.'

'Arabic?'

'My brother's family once lived in Tangier, and she was brought up there. You'll meet her in a few minutes, and I want you to have lunch together to firm up your cover stories. Now, a couple more details. Get out to Gib and look up Philip Harvey, of Randall Oil Limited. He's our man there and he'll brief you on the contraband part of your assignment. After the job's finished, he'll bring you up to date on the resident. Your contact in Tangier is Ricardo Gomez, a clerk in the commercial section of our consulate. Anything else?'

'Where's the five hundred and another five for lunch?'

'You're a mercenary son-of-a-bitch! Didn't you ever hear of patriotism and duty?'

Having got him going, I tried again. 'Don't make me laugh, you cheap bastard! Why should I pay my own expenses, doing something for you?'

'For the Queen!'

'Rubbish! The five hundred.'

'I'll send it to you. You've certainly changed since the war.'

'Balls, I'm just wise to you now. If you want me to do a dirty job, you can bloody well pay.'

'I'll get Sandra,' he said, his face under control again. When he returned shortly, he said: 'Robert Belcourt, my niece, Sandra Grant.'

He was wrong: she was not attractive; she was a stunning, blonde beauty. I grinned at him.

‘You can skip the five pounds.’

Chapter 2

She smiled as she took my hand. 'How do you do, Mr Belcourt. My uncle has told me a lot about you.'

'I hope some of it was complimentary. He uses his own low nature in measuring everyone else.'

Grant ignored me. 'Well, run along, and good luck to you both.'

I followed her out of the office and walked beside her to the street. She was a rarity in that she had none of the insipid features so often found in blondes. Her face was classic and serene, though the warm blue eyes belied any coldness of character. Her figure was magnificent, and she had dressed to emphasize her full breasts and slim waist. Her legs alone would attract most male eyes.

I started: 'Miss Grant ...'

✓ 'Let's get it on a first name basis, Robert,' she broke in. 'It's Sandra.'

'Well, Sandra, it's early for lunch. Why don't we get my car and drive up the Thames to Henley. I know a fine place there.'

'I hope it's not too expensive.'

'It isn't, but that has nothing to do with it.'

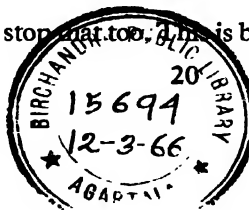
'Oh, but it has,' she said, turning to look at me. 'I'm paying for my own lunch.'

'Don't be silly. I ...'

'No, Robert, let's get this off on the right foot. I'm going fifty-fifty on all expenses, and I want it understood right now.'

I gestured with my hands. 'Why can't I take a beautiful girl to ... ?'

'And you can stop that too, if this is business.'



'Sure, I know it's business, but you're the best dish I've seen in months.'

'I warned you. If you keep that up, it's going to be a quick lunch.'

'What did your uncle tell you about me? Look, I'm not on the make; I'm in the film business and deal with pretty girls every day. When I said you were beautiful, I meant it sincerely and as a professional.'

She laughed. 'I know you're a professional.'

'This is getting us nowhere!'

'I know. Just keep it neutral.'

'All right, you win.'

On the road to Henley, we discussed our cover stories. It was safer in a car than in a restaurant, where we might be spied upon by electronic eavesdroppers. Much intelligence information is gathered nowadays by such snoops, but their efficiency is reduced if the subjects are in a moving car with the radio on. Although the car may be bugged, interference with the recording instruments is caused by the radio, the electrical system of the car, and engine noise. In a restaurant, however, microphones may be hidden in a flower vase or in the salt cellar, while other devices may be beamed in from a distance.

We decided I would run an ad in a newspaper, seeking a secretary for a script writer, who planned to spend three months in Tangier. To bolster the cover story, I should interview several of the more promising applicants before apparently selecting Sandra. When I had rented a house in Tangier, I would cable her to join me.

'Of course,' she said, 'your friends will be surprised you hired a total stranger, instead of someone you know well.'

'One look at you, and no one'll blame me.'

She did not rise, and I felt I had won a round. 'Your uncle told me you were brought up in Tangier.'

'Partly. My father was in the consulate for five years, and we lived there until the end of the war, when I was fifteen.'

'He also told me you spoke Arabic.'

'Yes, I kept it up, though I may have trouble now with the Tangier dialect. As you may know, classical Arabic is quite different. How long have you known Tangier?'

'Since during the war, when I went over a few times for the firm. I guess I've spent a couple of months there since the war. I love the place.'

'So do I, but I understand it's no longer an Arab village.'

'It isn't. You haven't been back?'

'No.'

'Will anyone remember you?'

'If they do, I'll admit it, but I won't advertise it. Nor do I speak Arabic or Spanish, just French.'

'O.K.'

After lunch on the drive back to town, I asked her how she had become involved in British intelligence. I did not expect a comprehensive reply, nor did I get one, merely a brief reference to her uncle and her university training in languages. She told me she knew I had another mission in Tangier, but did not question me about it.

'How about a drink before we part?' I suggested, as we drove towards her flat.

'No, Robert. Let's keep it the way we started. It's better that way. I do like you, you know. You're quite an improvement on my uncle's version, and I'm really looking forward to Tangier.'

'Me too, doll. The sooner the better.'

She smiled. 'Well, good-bye for now. I'll leave as soon as I get your cable. And don't push it.'

'Of course. Neutrality all the way.'

'Well, not unaligned neutrality.'

'I should hope not. Good-bye, Sandra.'

Several days later in Gibraltar, Harvey told me what he knew of the contraband racket. 'That's it,' he finished. 'Now, you've got everything we have, and Grant told you what we want. By the way, nobody has told me what experience you have as a seaman.'

'I've been messing about on small boats since I was a kid. I can handle sail, marlin-spike seamanship, navigation, cooking, and practically anything else except engines. I did a month's ocean cruising last year, so I'll get by.'

'Fine. Get over to Tangier and look up Jim Gordon. I've told you quite a lot about him. Tell him you want to work for a couple of trips on his M. T. B. Explain you're a script writer – he probably knows from the papers anyway – and that you'll do the job for nothing. Offer him a hundred quid and come up to a hundred and fifty, if he balks. He's the proverbially mean Scot, so he should jump at the offer. If he agrees, one of the two seamen on board will immediately develop hepatitis, or what those quacks over there will think is hepatitis. The job should be yours. If that doesn't work, we'll try something else.'

'Where do I get the hundred and fifty?'

'Grant told me he gave you five hundred.'

'No, mate, that won't do. Cough up, or the deal's off.'

'I'll have to check with Grant.'

'You do that.'

Harvey left the room in acting out the tiresome drama directed by Grant. My guess was that he would return after a suitable interval with the money. Grant would have acknowledged it a faint hope that they could pry the hundred and fifty pounds out of me, but worth the effort.

A more sobering thought was that it would also underline my importance to the operation. Why was I, an occasional agent, in the strange position of being able to write my own ticket? Instead of running fulltime professionals at no extra cost to the secret fund, they had recruited me for both assignments. Also, they were willing to mark time over the spy master until I had reported fully on the contraband organization. It was illogical, unless my background equipped me uniquely for the two assignments. Was there a link between the two, and where did a possible nuclear explosion fit in? Since I am not the invincible agent of fiction, I did not look forward to the inevitable shocks as my role developed. They had given me a minimum of information,

according to the book, and it was left to me to improvise in following the leads they stingily exposed.

Harvey returned with a bundle of notes. 'Here's one hundred. Grant said he'd reimburse you if you had to go higher. But keep it to one-fifty.'

When I laughed, he looked at me seriously, then grinned. Typical of the nondescript official in British intelligence, he seemed bland and pompous and incapable of making decisions beyond those required of a minor business executive. Yet such a front must mask a tough, capable intriguer.

'You can't hold us up indefinitely,' he said. 'You've got six hundred quid now and you'd better start producing. To wind this up, here's the recognition signal between our agents. As a pen, its only peculiarity is that it was made by the MacQueen Pen Company of New Zealand, and is stamped accordingly. You're with one of the firm if someone shows you the pen and challenges with the words "Queen Company". When you reply, show your pen and say "Hongkong". Duck, if he starts talking about MacQueen and New Zealand.'

'Here's a key to box one-five-six in the British Post Office in Tangier. It's one of the odd things about the International Zone of Tangier that it has a branch of the British Post Office. It'll be nationalized soon, but, until it is, you've got a safe letter-drop between us. Don't worry about anyone seeing the key, because it's unlike any other used there. Your cover name is Oscar.'

Pausing, he fixed me with eyes that were no longer mild. 'There's a link between the spy master and the boat you'll be on. We think it's one of the crew - the Mike of that intercept Grant showed you. If he's the guy we think he is, be bloody careful. I'll tell you what we know of him. Like you, he's Canadian, and his name is Joe Lesnick . . .'

Chapter 3

At six o'clock, the skipper started the set. Over the whining transmitter, I heard him calling: 'Seagull, Seagull, Seagull . . .' He stopped, apparently listened to the receiver, then continued his chant for Seagull. During the third pause, I heard the receiver: 'O.K, Sword. O.K, Sword. One-three-six-seven-nine-six-four-nine-six-nine-zero-two.'

The numerals were repeated as I scribbled them on paper. Then our transmitter whined again, and the skipper came in: 'Roger, Seagull. Roger, Seagull. Out.' A few minutes after he switched off the set, I hauled in the hand-line and entered the deck-house. The skipper, a chart in front of him on a table, looked up at me.

'Everything O.K?' I asked.

'Sure,' he replied. 'The RV is about thirty miles south-south-west, according to my DR. I'll check it with a sight and get some bearings on Ustica and distance off, but I can only be a few miles out.'

'When's the RV?'

'Twenty-two hundred.'

I looked over his shoulder at a piece of paper, upon which he had written the twelve numerals and below them: 38 29 12 41 2157. Below them again were: 38 30 12 40 2200, the location and hour of the RV, or rendezvous. A loose-leaf notebook was open at a page headed '4', the date of the month, and carried two parallel columns of numerals. One ran from zero to nine, while the other had the same numerals jumbled in a simple substitution cipher. Since they dealt in many zeros, the smugglers disguised them by changing latitude 38° 30' to 38° 29',

one mile south, and longitude 12° 40' to 12° 41', three-quarters of a mile east. The hour 2157 meant 2200.

Such a substitution cipher could be broken easily, even if changed daily, for the cryptographers already had several clues. In these waters, the smugglers worked between latitudes thirty-eight and forty-two and longitudes twelve and sixteen. The area was two hundred and forty miles south to north and about one hundred and eighty miles west to east, of which one quarter was the Italian mainland. Any rendezvous would be after dark and before midnight so that the shore-bound boat could make the round trip before sunrise. From crossed radio bearings, the transmitting smuggling boat would be pinpointed, while a computer would determine from the ciphered transmission possible latitudes and longitudes of the rendezvous within a fifty-mile radius, about six hours cruising for most of the slow contrabanders.

The problem was in knowing the frequencies or crystals used so that the brief transmission could be picked up. I already knew what crystals our skipper used, but doubted that it would help Grant shadow a gun-runner. Not only could the crystals be changed without our knowledge, but it was also likely that radio silence would be maintained. The gun-runner's rendezvous with the freighter, probably bearing communist or Egyptian arms, would be at a pre-determined position that would not be changed by radio, except in emergency.

I had to determine what contrabanders might carry arms, after which Grant could have them shadowed by radar as soon as they left Tangier. But I did have some useful information for him on the sets and frequencies used by the contrabanders, the technical skill of the radio operators, and how a rendezvous was enciphered for transmission. No arms smuggler would draw attention to himself by installing a more powerful set or by signing on a competent key operator. Fortunately, the casual attitude of the present operators prescribed spoken transmission and elementary ciphers, for high speed key transmission and involved codes were beyond them. Such information would help Grant if

radio silence were broken because of bad weather or a contrived emergency. Heavy seas would force postponement of the transfer of arms from the freighter to a pitching smuggling boat, while close surveillance by warships or planes would dictate a delay until the shadowers departed.

That the Italian customs had never caught a smuggler as a result of radio interception meant nothing, for they had never concentrated on shadowing one boat. The Royal Navy, in preventing British vessels from running guns to the Algerian rebels, would employ all their electronic sophistication afloat and at shore establishments in Gibraltar and Malta.

The skipper interrupted my thoughts. 'Robert, will you get Birdie up here. I'll be on deck.'

I found the engineer and his assistant, Pierre, huddled over an engine, exchanging gibberish. He followed me up to the deck.

'I've made contact with them,' said the skipper. 'The RV is at ten o'clock, and it's only thirty miles away. Start up the central engine and throttle it well back. We've got slightly less than four hours, but we've got to move out of here. Ustica is too close, and the Ities may have a boat out.'

'You're not going to cruise for four hours?' asked Birdie.

'No, but I'm going west then southeast. They may think we're a fisherman if they've got us on radar. As soon as I've figured out the drift, I'll take us to a position where we can drift on to the RV.'

'When do you want to get under way?'

'In fifteen minutes. I'm going to take a sight first, get a bearing on Ustica, then check my figures on drift. We'll run all three engines flat out for the last ten minutes. O.K with you?'

'Sure. If we're going in tonight, we might as well warm them up.'

The cook had joined us and facing away from Sicily, was sniffing.

'Man, that land is close. I can smell it there,' he said pointing over the bow. 'Reminds me of a time during prohibition, when

I was coming in on Florida with a load of booze. Same sort of land haze too. We had to shoot our way out of a trap set by Dillinger's high-jackers. Yes, sir, those were the days.'

Birdie snorted: 'You'd look pretty silly firing a gun at the age of twelve, which is what you were when prohibition ended.'

'I'll have you know . . .' started the cook.

Stow it,' said Birdie, 'I've seen your passport.'

'Ah, but that's not my right name,' said the cook. 'When I got into a bother during the razor wars, I had to change . . .'

'Which Dillinger were you talking about?' I interrupted.

'Hell, there was only one,' said the cook. 'What a boy! You know, Skip, I've got a feeling in my bones: you'd better watch out tonight. Those wops aren't to be trusted. But give me a tommy, and I'll . . .'

'Will you cut the crap!' exploded the skipper. 'Go below and burn some tinned beans! We'll eat at nine, and I want sandwiches and coffee at midnight.'

The cook sighed: 'I was only trying . . .'

'Beat it, you gut-robber!' yelled Birdie.

The cook went below, mumbling to himself. Then the skipper turned to me: 'When we get under way, stream the log, then go on lookout with the glasses. The Ities usually patrol east-west just north of Ustica.'

Twenty minutes later, I was in my look-out post, thinking about the others of the six-man crew.

The skipper was John Short, whose upper middle-class background made him an incongruity aboard this tub. How and where John had become unhinged, no one knew. His educational background was Eton and Oxford, and during the war, he had distinguished himself briefly as an officer aboard torpedo boats. He returned to Oxford after the war to complete the studies that would fit him to follow his father, a diplomat. This career had actually been launched, when he threw it away to join friends on a cruise to the Caribbean for buried pirate treasure. Several more years as a yachting bum had followed until he found Tanger and his present niche.

Afloat, he typified the efficient seaman and keen smuggler. He ran his boat smoothly and knew his position always to within a few miles. At least once every two hours, he determined a line of position with his sextant, a level of navigational skill rarely attained by his fellow captains. His employers esteemed him because he had vowed never to be imprisoned. For me, however, it was unsettling to know he had three incendiary bombs he intended to use, should Italian patrol boats – or ‘the enemy’, as he fiercely termed them – ever come alongside.

Ashore in Tangier, he found release in alcohol and sex. Although he drank only the best Scotch and champagne, his tastes deteriorated in selecting bed companions. He disdained the young, pretty women who were attracted by his charm and virile good looks and turned to well-travelled whores of a minimum age of forty-five. In knocking about the world, he had found his favourite night club in Paris: a bizarre establishment, where elderly ladies braided their grey hair in pigtails and wore pinafores above their varicose-veined legs. His current mistress was a rotund, screeching Pole of fifty-five.

Nor was the engineer everyone’s image of a smuggler. Birdie was a Cockney, who had been a flight engineer in the wartime Royal Air Force and a peacetime mechanic with an airline. His conversion to smuggling had occurred when he vacationed in Tangier and fell in love with a Spanish whore. Having decided to forsake his job, he was happily going through his funds when the whore examined his wallet. She had shrilled that she was not available to the poor and badgered him into taking his present job. The arrangement pleased both: she was free to resume her normal activities when he was at sea, while he, afloat and distant, imagined a deep love for a chaste chatelaine who regularly produced sound English cuisine.

Behind his friendly, cheerful front lay a violent nature that harmonized fully with that of the skipper. At his engines, he personified efficiency, checking them constantly and swearing they were as good as any Rolls Royce Merlins he had serviced during the war. His equally dedicated assistant was a Frenchman,

with whom he communicated in their own peculiar tongue. I doubted that I could have chosen a more efficient trio than the skipper and the two engineers to keep me out of Italian jails.

As companions, the skipper and engineer had an intelligent and humorous approach to most subjects and only became tiresome when discussing their mistresses. I had wearied of the skipper's reflection that 'you can't teach an old bag new tricks; you don't have to.' Birdie's tales of the purity and domesticity of his paramour no longer amused me, and I had to leave him whenever he speculated on how to persuade her to bake a Melton Mowbray pork pie.

Al, the English cook, lived in a dream world, on which, unfortunately, the realities of cooking rarely impinged. He considered himself an adventurer in the romantic mould. Now, in his imagination, he was probably aboard a privateer serving an earlier Queen Elizabeth against corsairs off Barbary. He had fought, so he told us, in the Spanish civil war both with and against Franco, in the World War as a spy, commando, paratrooper, and French Foreign Legionnaire, and in the Korean War as an American marine. He took himself seriously and resented ridicule, but his martial pretensions collapsed when he was faced with a fight.

Joe Lesnick and I completed the crew. My information on him came from Harvey's intelligence sources, from the skipper and Birdie, and from personal observation. Since he was a suspected Russian agent, I had tried to be friendly, but had not dented the armour he raised against fellow Canadians with backgrounds different from his. In Canada, he said, Ukrainians were enslaved for economic reasons and derided as social inferiors by Anglo-Saxons who had to reinforce their own inadequacies. As a Canadian, I knew this was largely nonsense.

To augment the family income, he had worked at the age of fourteen as a bellboy in a Toronto hotel, where his good looks attracted lonely women. Finding it an easy way to earn pocket money, he never forgot it. Later, he was a steward on a Canadian

airline flying into Britain until the customs there caught him smuggling currency. Released after a short prison sentence, he remained in Britain earning his living as a gigolo and chiseller.

It was believed he was recruited then by Russian intelligence, according to Harvey, and sent to Tangier one year ago. Harvey had not outlined what Lesnick was suspected of doing now or earlier, but I knew this might not mean ignorance, merely policy in giving agents a minimum of information. As well as preying on women in Tangier, he had worked regularly on contraband boats. He was well regarded as a seaman by the skipper and Birdie, though they objected to his crude aggressiveness.

If he were a communist, it followed from his being an intuitive rebel against society and not from atavistic patriotism nor reason. Indeed, he was as rancorous on communism as he was on democracy and espoused anarchism as the great panacea. His knowledge of political philosophy being negligible, he declaimed about a mysterious 'they' who manoeuvred banks, oil, shipping and steel companies, bishops and politicians, and, even, athletes and sports promoters, against 'the people'. Someone had given him a few facile slogans that sustained his ill-defined resentment of all authority.

His occasional life of prostitution and petty larceny had exposed other characteristics, according to the skipper and Birdie. They said he had the soul of a waiter: obsequious affability in running errands for his benefactress, combined with spiteful personal observations in her absence. Gratitude was unknown to him, and when drunk, he reverted to mean pugnacity. In addition to his rare displays of geniality, he had a cynical wit that his experiences had sharpened. His quips were sarcastic, though frequently semi-illiterate. He had no manners and revelled in his crudities, especially during meals when he resembled a domesticated animal at the trough. Birdie described him as 'a zircon in the rough'.

Although his background and character did not seem to recommend him, it was not unusual for the communists to run

such an agent. They could depend on him as long as he was opposing authority and destroying some of its edifices, particularly if they were Anglo-Saxon. Tough, physically and mentally, he was crafty and skilled in the practical psychology of human relationships. In addition to having these attributes of an agent, he was taciturn in reference to himself and much of his past. Whether the Russians would entrust him with a key role in a delicate operation, I could not guess, especially one that might involve a nuclear explosion. British intelligence were convinced he was an important Russian agent, but had revealed nothing more to me. What he was doing aboard this boat was a mystery, since it seemed a sterile post for a high level agent.

One part of my assignment was completed, for I had learned the background of the smuggling racket from the skipper and Birdie. Two years ago, the United States had exported to Tangier 1,390,140,000 cigarettes, valued at \$5,466,881, according to figures published by the Department of Commerce in Washington. Tangier was second to Venezuela, the top importer, and took more cigarettes than Sweden, fifth, and France, sixth, combined. These cigarettes were smoked in Tangier, or, in a tax-free condition, sold to passing ships for their passengers and crew, re-exported to other countries, or smuggled elsewhere. Tangier was not the supply point for the rest of Morocco, since the former Spanish and French zones imported cigarettes directly from the United States.

If every man, woman, and child of Tangier's population of 172,000 smoked these cigarettes, each would go through four hundred tax-paid packs of twenty cigarettes during the year. Not only was such a consumption ridiculous, but it was also beyond the financial reach of all but some 5,000 Tangerines, who could afford the more heavily taxed American brands. Moreover, of that 5,000, the French usually preferred French cigarettes and the English their national brands. In fact, most Tangerines smoked cheap cigarettes made in Morocco. Sales to passing ships were limited because Tangier was not a bustling

port. Further, most freighters and passenger liners calling there took aboard their stores in their ports of origin. The legal re-export trade was insignificant, since all countries near Tangier on the Mediterranean littoral were listed in the American government figures as direct importers.

Consequently, most of the 1,390,140,000 cigarettes were smuggled to Italy, Spain, or Portugal, none of which were among the top ten importers. The skipper thought a low estimate of smuggled cigarettes would be 100,000 cases of 10,000 each. This would leave Tangier 39,014 cases to be disposed of legally, an exaggerated figure in his opinion.

According to the American figures, each case cost \$39.33 at the port of embarkation. Transportation and insurance costs to Tangier were about \$4.00 a case. Since the smugglers bought the cases on the Tangier docks at \$45.00 each, a gross profit of \$167,000 on the 100,000 cases was shared among three Tangier importers. These importers were engaged in legitimate business, selling for cash and never smuggling. Their returns on their investments were rapid, and their overheads negligible. Some had even formed banks to finance their purchase of cigarettes with other people's money.

To the American tobacco companies, they were prized clients, and their comments were always heeded. For example, after the importers passed on smugglers' complaints about the permeable state of the cardboard cases, the companies obliged with a container guaranteed to float on the sea for thirty minutes. Thus, if a careless seaman dropped a case over the side while passing it to an Italian fisherman, it could be retrieved undamaged.

Behind the importers, who were actually sub-agents, was a publicity-shy tycoon, who lived in Switzerland. After the war, the major American tobacco companies had appointed his father their agent in most Mediterranean ports as well as in Tangier and Gibraltar. He had prospered in the legitimate trade of selling cigarettes to all comers and then turned the business over to his son, now in his early thirties. The sub-agents took a larger slice of the contraband pie than the Swiss, who was probably

content with about fifty cents a case, paid directly to him by the tobacco companies. Hence, he earned \$50,000 alone from the Tangier operation in 1954.

Few contraband cargoes belonged either wholly or partly to the boat owners, who simply contracted to move a case of cigarettes from Tangier to Italian waters for upwards of \$15. Instead, a dozen Tangier residents shared ownership of most of the cargoes and rarely permitted outside investment. The boat and cargo owners split a gross profit of some \$3,000,000 on the 100,000 cases, for the cigarettes were sold off Italy and Sicily for \$75 a case.

If a boat were captured by the Italian authorities, both boat and cargo were confiscated, and the crew usually sentenced to a year in jail. Although the cargo owners lost their investments, the boat owners were rarely inconvenienced, for they realized the initial cost of the vessel after a few trips. Most boat owners kept their expenses low by paying their crews the lowest possible wages, providing the cheapest of food, and spending a minimum on maintenance of the boats. Sometimes when a crew were captured, the boat owner engaged lawyers for their defence and paid their wages while they served their inevitable sentences and their expenses back to Tangier when they were freed. But such benevolence was rare.

To stamp out the racket, the Italians seized contraband boats wherever they spotted them, ignoring any internationally recognized territorial limits. Recently, the smugglers had nullified this practice with their latest dodge, our ex-torpedo boat. We took the cigarettes aboard from the slower craft in waters too far offshore for normal Italian patrolling and made the round-trip to the coast with the advantage of our superior speed. The disadvantage was our petrol consumption, for we had to be towed from Tangier by the slower vessels and have fuel brought out to us by them. No port, except Malta, would have supplied us, and we would have been seized had we entered harbours in Spanish Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Spain, France, Italy, or Sicily. By calling at Malta, however, we would have revealed to Italian

informers that we would soon be working off southern Italy or Sicily.

We landed the cigarettes for a higher price of \$90 a case, and some of the extra \$15 were shared among the crew. The skipper was paid £80 monthly and one dollar for every case landed, while the chief engineer earned £50 and 25 cents a case. The rest of us were paid £30 each, which was doubled when we were at sea, and shared among us 50 cents a case. (The owner, Gordon, of course, pocketed my wages and share of the bonus.) This scale of remuneration was considered generous, for the crews of the slower boats earned much less, though they usually are better. Wine and cigarettes were free, and other crews received, as well, *apéritifs* and spirits.

The racket got under way after the war, when a case of American cigarettes sold for \$500 on the Neapolitan black market. Gibraltarians were the first to see the potential because of their long history of contraband trade to Spain. Originally, they prevailed upon itinerant yachtsmen to smuggle the cigarettes, then they bought and equipped their own boats. Now, the trade was dominated by Corsican racketeers.

In the beginning, Italy and France were the favoured destinations, but France was now patrolled by normally incorruptible customs crews. Italy presented greater opportunities, because many officials in the customs and police proved bribable. Organizations established by the Mafia distributed the cigarettes in Italy and Sicily and were so efficient that newcomers found it impossible to get into the racket unless they dealt with them. Hence, an alliance between the Mafia and Corsican racketeers had driven the amateurs to other callings.

About twenty-five boats, mostly cheap surplus Royal Navy launches, mine-sweepers, and Fairmiles, were involved and usually flew the British flag, though some were registered in Central American countries. British maritime law is not overly concerned with legitimate cargo manifests and also sanctions trading on the high seas by small boats. This commerce is specifically forbidden by Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Italian laws. Since

British-registered vessels must carry a British skipper, most of the smugglers were skippered by Britons, with Arabs and Spaniards comprising the majority of the crews.

Although the Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese governments protested regularly, the governments actually condoning the racket did nothing. As required by Tangier law, the American legation there authorized every re-export of American cigarettes from Tangier, while the British consulate-general there normally witnessed the signing of the smuggling crews to British articles. Nor did the Tangier government interfere, because they levied a small tax on the re-export of the cigarettes. In Gibraltar, every facility was offered the contrabanders, who frequently picked up there other cargoes, such as Scotch whisky, coffee, and Japanese transistor radios.

Chapter 4

Soon after we were under way to the rendezvous, the sun sank, the western sky blazed, and the grey sea brightened, heralding a gaudy sunset. I was on the bridge aft of the skipper, scanning the horizon, but saw nothing, not even a trace of smoke that might be a freighter approaching or leaving Palermo. The peace of a sunset at sea was broken only by the vibration of our central engine pushing us through the still moderating swell at eight knots.

Before twilight ended just after seven o'clock, I glimpsed what might have been the superstructure of a small boat to the north-east, but lost it immediately in the waning light. I alerted the skipper, but we saw nothing more. At seven-thirty, Lesnick relieved me and grunted surlily as I handed him the binoculars.

'There may be something,' I said, 'on the starboard quarter.'

Before I went below, the skipper told me to soak the decks. While I was finishing, Lesnick shouted:

'Skip, navigational lights coming in fast on our starboard quarter! He's about two miles off.'

The skipper jangled the telegraphs for half-speed on all engines and swung on to a southerly course. The two outboard engines coughed into life, as I climbed to the bridge.

'Take the wheel, Robert,' yelled the skipper over the increasing roar. 'Steer south. I'll check it with Joe.'

Since the ex-torpedo boat answered well to the helm, I kept on course with slight adjustments of the wheel. My eyes were on the horizon directly for'ard, though they frequently flickered to the compass. A glance at the three revolution counters showed that Birdie had all engines on half-speed. The hull had risen,

but was not yet planing over the swell. Ten minutes after I had taken the wheel, the skipper relieved me and signalled for reduced speed on all engines.

'We've lost him,' he said. 'I've throttled back because we can't waste petrol haring about. Get me a written reading of the log and stay on lookout with Joe.'

After handing him a slip of paper with the log's mileage, I joined Lesnick. In the emergency, neutral efficiency had replaced dislike in his attitude to me.

'Belcourt,' he said, 'you take starboard.'

'What did you see?' I asked.

'Navigational lights moving quickly. It must have been the same one you saw, and it was too fast to be anything but the law. Neither Skip nor I saw it again.'

We drove through the swell at the reduced speed, and the motion was erratic and frequently jolting. Then the skipper told me to take the wheel, while he plotted our position from sights of two stars shot during twilight. Later, he stood with Lesnick, then replacing me at the wheel, told me to get Birdie.

Birdie, who had not been on deck since the other vessel was sighted, contained his curiosity until we were with the skipper.

'What's up, Skip?' he asked.

'Probably an Itie patrol boat, but we've lost 'em again. I can't carry out my original plan of drifting on to the RV. Since they've probably got radar, we've got to stay in this area to keep the patrol boat away from the Fairmile. We'll mess about on the central engine and head for the RV at nine-thirty. But stand by to get the outboard engines going immediately. If it's got radar, the patrol boat may creep up on us. Stay in the engine room and get Pierre to bring food for both of you.'

Turning to me, he said: 'Get some sandwiches for the three of us . . . You know, that Itie may think he's clever. We last saw him on the starboard quarter, so watch for him on the port bow. He could do it with a bit of speed and radar. When you're below, double-check that no lights show.'

With Lesnick again, I gave him thick slabs of bread and bully

and a mug of harsh coffee. After he heard the patrol boat might try to surprise us, he said:

'Makes sense. How's your night vision?'

'So-so.'

'Mine's first rate. I'll take port.'

The minutes crept by as we peered into the darkness. Suddenly we heard the approaching roar of high revving engines.

The skipper had heard them and clanged the telgraphs for half-speed on all engines. 'We'll show the bastards some speed,' he grinned. He swung the wheel to starboard as our engines caught, blanketing any sound from the approaching boat.

Lesnick was yelling:

'Can't hear anything now, but I think they were on the port bow before we changed course . . . Where the hell are they? . . . They have to be close by . . . What's that? . . . By Jesus, it is! They're coming in fast on the port quarter!'

The telegraphs rang again, as the skipper called for full speed on all engines. He shouted: 'Watch out for small arms fire! The trigger-happy bastards open up on anything!'

Just as I saw the patrol craft, our engines snarled into high speed, and we planed forward, immediately widening the distance between the two boats. Idly I watched some sparks arcing up from the disappearing patrol boat before I realized it was fire from an automatic weapon. The aim was off, for we never found any trace of bullets. We sped away, and after twenty minutes, swept back on to our former course to the south.

'Should be O.K. now,' said the skipper, reducing speed. 'I'll tell you when we're near the RV.'

For the next forty-five minutes, my only break from lookout's duties was at nine-thirty, when I checked the log, after which the skipper went below briefly to plot our position. At nine-fifty, he told us to watch for a white light that would be shown only for ten minutes from nine-fifty-five. Soon, I noted he was steering in a wide circle, apparently because he felt he was at the rendezvous. Birdie had told me about the skipper's uncanny ability at dead reckoning, but I was sceptical. We had changed

course often since his last sight, while he had checked the chart twice, working only with mileages from the log.

My watch showed ten o'clock, and neither Lesnick nor I had seen a light. I looked aft, then slowly examined the starboard quarter up to the beam. I almost missed it before it registered, and my eyes swung back.

'White light on starboard beam!' I sang out.

'Good! Take this torch,' said the skipper, handing it to me, 'and flash a steady light at him until he acknowledges with one of the same colour. And get me on to it, because I haven't seen it yet.'

I directed him until he saw the white light. Within seconds of my aiming my orange beam at the other light, it had been acknowledged.

'He's signalling orange!' I shouted.

'O.K, Robert,' said the skipper, 'take the wheel.'

As I took it, he said:

'I'll put you in a circle about him, because I want to be sure who it is. If it's O.K, I'll shut down the outboard engines and go dead slow on the central one. When we're close enough, I'll take the wheel. Got it?'

As we circled the vessel, I recognized it as the one that had towed us from Tangier. Ten minutes later, we were lying with our engines off and for'ard of the Fairmile. They had already launched a dinghy with three men in it. When alongside, one of them threw me the painter, and I pulled them to a rope ladder. After they climbed up, I made the painter fast.

Our skipper greeted them, and as they entered the deck-house, said to me: 'Tell Lesnick to stay up there on lookout, and you stand by the wheel. The Fairmile'll get under way, if we drift too close. But Birdie and Pierre are on standby in the engine room if there's an emergency.'

He came out twenty minutes later and called me down. When I joined him, he said: 'Robert, you speak Italian, don't you?'

'Yes.'

'Tell Lesnick to stand by the wheel, while you come inside

with me. Don't tell them in there you're a script writer and remember you don't have to do what they want. You're strictly on your own.'

Inside, I recognized two of our visitors: one was the Fair-mile's skipper, and the other the super-cargo, the owner's brother, Bob, who handled the commercial aspects of the smuggling for the two boats. The third was a squat, tough-looking stranger. I waved at the pair I knew and was introduced to the stranger, whose name was Strauss. He said to me in Italian with a strong German accent: 'They tell me you speak Italian. How well do you speak it and where did you learn it?'

'I can get by anywhere,' I replied in Italian. 'I learned it during the war and have kept it up since. Why?'

He continued in Italian: 'I want someone to go ashore tomorrow night to snoop on the shore organization. We do it often to get wise to them because they're a tricky lot of bastards. But they mustn't know you speak Italian. They know I do, so they clam up. But you're a stranger and you should get away with it. Do you think you can handle it?'

I shrugged. 'I'm not so sure. If they use the Sicilian dialect, I'm sunk.'

'One of them went to the States as a baby, and when his parents died, he was brought up by an Italian family. He's Sicilian, but he can't speak it. So the rest have to speak Italian.'

I controlled my eagerness, for this might clear up some of the missing details of my contraband assignment, especially if I were to snoop on a Sicilian who had spent most of his life in the United States. 'In that case, I can do it. You've got someone going in with me, haven't you?'

'Sure, Gordon has to anyway,' Strauss said, gesturing to the owner's brother. 'Some business to clear up. He only speaks English, and they know it.'

'What do you want me to listen for?'

His face was expressionless. 'Anything to do with us; it all helps. Well?'

I nodded. 'O.K., but what's in it for me?'

'You'll get off this tub for twenty-four hours, you'll eat well, and you'll probably get laid. What else do you want?'

'Money, chum. Jim Gordon didn't sign me on for shore errands.'

'All right, one thousand pesetas.'

I shook my head. 'That won't do. I want three thousand.'

'You can have two, and I don't go any higher.'

I studied him. 'All right, you've got a deal.'

Smiling, he said: 'You're right: you'll get by. One more thing: no one aboard must know you speak Italian, especially the pilot, who's taking you in tonight.'

I was dismissed with a wave of his hand.

'Where's the two thousand?' I asked in English.

'You'll get it tomorrow at the RV.'

'I'll have it now, or there's no deal.'

He glared, then relaxed. 'All right, here's your two thousand. But I want results for that kind of money.'

I had to exert myself with this square-head, but it was a safe gamble. He would never have made the proposal to me, a stranger, had another trustworthy Italian-speaking crew member been available. It was I or no one, and I was tempted to tell him so in his own language.

'Look, chum,' I snapped, 'you can stuff the two thousand because you're not buying results. I guarantee nothing.'

He sprang up, his eyes mean. 'It's *Mister Strauss* to you,' he spat out.

'Oh yeah,' I sneered, throwing the two thousand at his feet.

Gordon got up. 'Break it up, you two! Look, Strauss, this guy works for me. If you want him to do something, and he and I agree, then it's all right. Otherwise, he stays aboard.'

Strauss calmed down. 'Sure, sure. We're all a little tired.'

Then he picked up the notes and handed them to me. It underlined how urgently he wanted anyone, even a surly stranger, to eavesdrop on his accomplices. But he had no intention of telling me what specifically interested him, since, presumably, he trusted neither me nor his associates in the cabin.

I turned to Gordon. 'O.K, Bob, I'll do it, but you'd better fill in the blanks.'

'Sure,' he said. 'Your job is simple, because I'm not supposed to know much about boats. It's a gag I've used in the past to stall the wops. You'll be the mate of this boat and you're ashore as my adviser. But even so, we can't make final decisions, so you don't have to worry about committing me to anything. They'll probably haggle about prices, and I'll ask you about fuel consumption. And that should be it.'

'Sounds all right,' I said. 'Anything else?'

'No,' said my skipper. 'Tell everyone we're going into Palermo tonight. Then get back on the bridge.'

I went to the engine room first, where Birdie and Pierre looked up at me curiously.

'Skip says we're going into Palermo,' I told them. 'What does that mean?'

'Exactly what he says,' said Birdie.

'He doesn't mean right into the harbour, does he?'

'The hell he doesn't! Those Sicilian customs and harbour cops are so crooked they put their clothes on with a corkscrew. The only guys we're worried about are on the patrol boats. The crews are appointed by Rome, and if they've got one honest officer aboard, it's difficult to piece them off. All we can do is have them patrol another part of the coast.'

'Like tonight?'

'Hell, you can't work on a sure thing all the time.'

'Who pieces off the customs and the cops?'

'You heard of the Mafia?'

'Yeah, in Hollywood films.'

'Don't laugh, Robert, it's the Mafia that arranges everything ashore. We deal with them or we don't sell our cigarettes, and they do a neat job of peddling them too. Hell, we can't bring enough. Oh no, mate, don't laugh. It's the Mafia that pays our salaries.'

He paused and grinned up at me. 'These smugglers give me a laugh. They like to think they're just being boys and having

some clean fun, like Aunt Nelly sneaking a half-bottle through the customs or Uncle Bill his dirty book. Balls! When you're tied in with the Mafia, you're nothing but a crook. And that applies to you, me, and Pierre, as well as Gordon.'

On the bridge, Lesnick was unconcerned about our going into Palermo, but interested in who had come aboard from the Fairmile. When I named Strauss, he swore: 'That lousy hun!'

'What's with him?'

'He was in the S. S. - a real bastard!'

'Anything personal?'

'I had a fight with him in Tangier,' he growled, 'but that isn't it. He's a rotten son-of-a-bitch!'

'Why?'

He shrugged. 'Aren't you supposed to be on lookout?'

He was hunched over the wheel as I started towards the after part of the bridge, but he straightened up, calling: 'Hey, what did they want to see you about?'

I laughed: 'I'll tell you sometime; I'm supposed to be on lookout.'

When the conference broke up at eleven o'clock, the Fairmile's skipper left with Strauss. Several minutes later, the Sicilian fisherman who was to pilot us into Palermo was rowed over, and we got under way at about fifteen knots on all engines. From the chart, I had estimated we had thirty-five miles to a point off Cape Gallo, north of Palermo, and eight miles more to the harbour.

While the skipper took the wheel and the Sicilian the lookout's post, Gordon called Lesnick and me below to the cargo hold in the bow, forward of our sleeping quarters. The cases containing one-and-a-half million cigarettes were stacked and lashed down with slip knots. They had cost \$6,750 in Tangier and would be landed against payment, already made into a Swiss bank, of \$13,500. If the money had not been deposited, Jim Gordon, in Tangier, would have wirelessed cancellation of our trip into Palermo.

'Count the stacks,' said Gordon. 'There should be a hundred

and fifty-one, and I want the extra one out. Make sure those knots aren't fast. When we're alongside, you two come here immediately. Robert, use that hammer to undo the hatch fastenings, and, Joe, loosen the lashings. After I get the hatch off from above, Joe hands the cases to Robert, and he pushes them through the hatch. We've got half-an-hour to get them off-loaded.'

When the tally was completed, he told us to go on deck. Back on the bridge, we greeted the Sicilian, who was lean and old and had a stage Italo-American accent. 'Don't worry about a thing, boys,' he said, patting his scrawny chest. 'Tony'll get you in and out without any bastard cops. You two look to left and right and leave Tony up ahead. O.K?'

'Sure,' I said. 'How's the Mafia these days?'

'By Jesus Christ, it's fine,' he cackled. 'Me, Mafia. Don't worry boys, Tony'll get you in and out fine. I spit on those bastard cops. Just like old times, eh, bringing in the booze from Canada to Detroit?'

Lesnick laughed: 'Belcourt, you think we should get Cookie up here? They might have a gay old time together.'

It was probably as close as I would ever get to Lesnick, so I took the risk. 'That Strauss, has he got an interest in this boat?'

'I don't know.'

'Then what was he doing aboard?'

'We unload most of his cigarettes. I suppose that was it.'

'How tough is he?'

'Plenty. He's also as crooked as hell. He'll do anything for a buck - anything whatsoever. He'll cheat you if he doesn't respect you, and you can never scare him.'

'What other rackets is he in?'

Once again within half-an-hour, he stared fixedly at me after I had questioned him about Strauss. 'What do you mean?'

'Well, don't tell me his only racket is cigarettes. Surely in Tangier, there are other fiddles for a boy like that?'

'Like what?'

'You tell me; I'm new here.'

'I don't know what you're talking about, Belcourt,' he said slowly. 'It pays not to ask too many questions about guys like Strauss.'

He stared at me again, then looked aft. 'Hey, Tony,' he yelled, 'what's that big ship back there?'

'Passenger ship from Sardinia,' replied Tony. 'She goes back tomorrow, and we'll have some of your cigarettes aboard. Don't you boys worry. We take care of everything. I spit on the bastard cops.'

We continued our vigil, though my mind wandered. Where did Strauss fit into my assignment? Although reticent about the German, Lesnick had termed him rapacious and unscrupulous, two characteristics of anyone running arms or drugs. As for Lesnick himself, I was resigned to learning nothing from him about his link with the spy master in Tangier nor about his role in any possible nuclear explosion. He was too taciturn, especially with me. From these thoughts, my mind ran on to my postponed vacation in Tangier. After this smuggling voyage, I could unwind with Sandra Grant, before tackling the problem of the spy master, or so I hoped.

Almost two hours passed before we saw the loom of the lights over Palermo. Shipping was thicker, and we ghosted along without lights, giving a wide berth to each vessel and leaving a luminous, frothing wake. The wan moonlight was perfect for either noble commando raids or ignoble smuggling ventures. From a flashing point, the light on Cape Gallo had become a sweeping beam, as we passed the cape and came within a half-mile of the next headland. We crossed a shallow bay with lights twinkling along its shoreline, then, rounding its southerly point, were under a towering and steeply ascending mountain for most of the five miles to the harbour. Since the offshore depth was considerable, we kept only a half-mile to starboard for emergency manoeuvring.

Tony talked to himself constantly in Italian, halting the flow occasionally to order in English: 'Left . . . Left . . . That's it . . . Don't you worry, boys . . . I spit on the bastard cops . . .'

The main harbour light now flashed over us, and soon the three lights on the mole were visible. The navigational lights of small boats, probably fishermen, moved in and out of the harbour, interspersed among those of a few coasters. Most hooted occasionally or broke the stillness with the chugging of their slow diesels. We were now running along the mole. On it, I saw a uniformed man with a carbine slung over his shoulder, apparently just as he saw us. Tony, who had obviously been watching for him, flashed a red beam five times, and the guard replied with three blue flashes.

'You see, boys,' said Tony, 'everything is O.K. Don't you worry at all. Now, Captain, slow down. That green light is the end of the mole, and the barges are in their usual place.'

The skipper telegraphed for neutral on the outboard engines and dead slow on the central one. We carried a lot of way, however, and our speed was unaltered. The noise of the three idling Merlins was not reassuring, for at this hour their roar might carry across the harbour to the ears of some honest and awake officials. But the Mafia had the answer: a large travelling crane started up noisily on the inshore side of the mole and crawled towards land.

'You see, boys,' said Tony. 'I signal the good cop, and he signals the man on the crane. Pretty good, eh?'

We turned into the harbour and kept twenty yards off the mole. Three dredging barges were tied up alongside one another, two hundred yards from the end of the breakwater. As men winched them out on bow and stern anchors, a space large enough to take us opened between them and the mole. We swept far out past the barges to clear their taut anchor chains and turned back towards the opening so that we would be headed to sea.

On deck, Lesnick and I placed fenders outboard, while Tony threw a heaving line on to the mole. As we nosed into the opening, a man hauled the stern warp ashore and looped it over a bollard. With the central engine thundering in astern, we rapidly lost way.

The skipper shouted: 'O.K, Tony, make fast! Joe and Robert, get below!'

As I ran below, I saw a large tank truck parked beside us on the mole. Below, I hammered out the hatch fastenings. Suddenly, the hatch was opened from above, and Gordon yelled down to us: 'Hand 'em up!'

Twenty-five minutes later, I pounded into position the bolts securing the hatch cover. Back on deck, I saw that all the cases were ashore and being loaded into the tank truck. It bore a sign proclaiming it the property of a Palermo wine merchant. As I joined the skipper and Tony on the bridge, a man jumped to the deck and scrambled over the life-lines to the mole, saying: 'Nice, fast work, Captain. See you tomorrow.'

The skipper turned to Tony. 'Tell them to cast off and let's get out of here.'

'Not just now,' grunted Tony, pointing to a lean powerboat turning into the harbour past the mole.

'What is it?' I asked.

'The bastard customs!'

Chapter 5

We froze: one man held up a case of cigarettes from the thirty other cases on the mole; another, crouching on the tanker, reached for the case; the head of a third showed above the opening in the tanker's body; the port policeman was silhouetted on the breakwater; the two men on the barges stood at their winches; and on the bridge, Skip, Lesnick, Tony, and I stared at the slowly moving patrol boat.

In the hands of a curious seaman, the searchlight on the patrol boat would illuminate the scene. The three barges to starboard would normally shield us against observation from across the harbour, but from nearby our silhouette bore no resemblance to those of the barges. But the crew of the patrol boat were making their vessel shipshape and preparing to come alongside. They were more interested in going to their bunks than in finding smugglers in their home port.

Suddenly, the big crane's engines started again, and it trundled noisily along the mole, a beam lighting its path. Surely this activity would draw away any idle eyes on the patrol boat? Within seconds, we would be safe. Even if they spotted us now, we could rocket out of our cover and reach the open sea before they could manoeuvre in pursuit. Their lookouts would soon be unable to distinguish between our silhouette and those of the barges. Binoculars, of course, would reveal us, but who examines the mole of his home port at two o'clock in the morning?

Lesnick broke the tension. 'I spit on you, you bastard customs!'

'O.K, Captain,' said Tony, 'take her out, but get round that mole quickly in case they look back.'

'No, I'll wait,' said the skipper, 'until they've got the last case aboard the tanker. We don't have to worry about the patrol boat tonight.'

Several aspects of the operation interested me, and I said: 'It wasn't much of a sweat anyway. We could've outrun them, if they'd seen us.'

'And lose this set-up?' said the skipper. 'Hell no! It's the best we've found yet.'

'How come,' I asked, 'there's nothing holding the barges to the mole? If there is something, why didn't we foul it?'

'They've sunk two concrete blocks. When they kedge the barges out, they make fast to the blocks.'

'Isn't the crane a little suspicious, working at this hour of the night?'

'Not at all. It breaks down constantly and they choose to repair and test it at night.'

'And the wine truck?'

He laughed. 'Look, you can't beat these guys. They've been outwitting the law for centuries. Actually, the tanker is supposed to be loaded with special wine from the mainland for bottling here. Naturally, there's little customs inspection.'

'Why aren't any other boats near us?'

'Robert, you can't win. They've got uniformed cops along the mole to shoo busybodies away.'

'O.K, I quit.'

The skipper looked towards the disappearing patrol boat, then jangled the telegraphs for neutral on all engines. 'All right,' he said, 'you and Joe get on deck. We're bugging off.'

When the last case of cigarettes had been stowed in the tanker, the driver and his helper got into their seats, waved to us, and drove away. The crane operator was climbing down one leg of his machine. On the breakwater, the policeman looked out to sea, then waved to us reassuringly. The area was silent except for our idling engines, but across the harbour was the bustle of a large port, never stilled no matter what the hour. A hooting railway engine shunted freight cars; old diesels in fishing boats

plugged away slowly; and a few boat-horns sounded. Three hundred yards away, two standing men were pushing the oars that drove them across the harbour.

'Tony, tell them to cast off,' ordered the skipper.

When Lesnick and I had the warps aboard, the telegraph jangled for slow ahead on the central engine. I acknowledged the waves of the two Sicilians on the mole and returned to the bridge. We crept free of the barges. Looking aft, I saw they were already coming alongside the mole, manoeuvred by the two men aboard and the pair ashore. We picked up way, and the skipper called for half-speed on all engines, as we rounded the end of the mole.

The next morning, Bob Gordon took me aside. 'Look, Robert, I don't think you realize what you're getting into tonight. You'll be dealing with the Mafia when we go ashore, or did you know that?'

'So?'

'That's the trouble: you think it's an exciting game you can work into your script. Get this: you'll be dealing with killers, who can smell a snoop a mile off. Normally, they're nice, quiet gangsters, but that front comes off suddenly if they're the least suspicious. Also, what do you know about that bastard hun and what he wants you to do?'

'Sweet F. A. He just told me to listen.'

'You've got no idea what you're supposed to listen for?'

'No.'

'Nor what Strauss is smuggling besides cigarettes?'

I looked at him blankly. 'No.'

'Well, keep this to yourself. But my brother and I think the son-of-a-bitch is smuggling drugs out of Sicily for the Mafia.'

'Jesus! Are you sure?'

'Yeah! For years, the Mafiosi have wanted someone to do it, but no one would touch the dirty stuff. We think they've got something on Strauss – not that it matters. He'd do anything for money.'

'But dope?'

He shrugged. 'Why not? Somebody's doing it. There are plenty of junkies in the States.'

'What could they have on him?'

'He was in the S. S. during the war. Maybe he baked a few yids or wops. I wouldn't put anything past the dirty hun.'

So why deal with him?'

He snorted. 'That's the hell of it now. When my brother came out here after the war, it was a lark. Then the hard boys moved in, and you dealt with them or you went back to selling ribbons or stocks. That's what happened to the Old Etonians who were in the business: they couldn't cope. We made a couple of bad deals and couldn't quite finance this boat. So Strauss owns twenty-four per cent and a Corsican thug another twenty-four . . . But that has nothing to do with you. Look, chum, do you get the picture?'

'I suppose so.'

'Well, don't forget: if they tumble, you could end up in the harbour.'

I grinned. 'Don't be melodramatic. This is nineteen-fifty-six.'

'So it is, but it's also Mafia home grounds.'

'Quit it. I'm shaking like an outhouse on Hallowe'en.'

'You should be.' He produced cigarettes, lit them, and stared at me curiously. 'Why take the chance? Why go ashore?'

'Hell, a change of grub . . . Chance to get laid . . . Why not?'

'Yeah, I suppose so . . . Oh, a couple of more things . . . Don't tell anyone why you're going ashore, especially Lesnick.'

'O.K., but why him?'

'I think he's a lousy cop. He asks too many questions.'

I laughed. 'Lesnick a cop! You're barmy!'

'Maybe, but I don't go for all that red talk. Christ, did you ever hear of a red ponce? It's just a front. Anyway, keep it quiet. The other thing is this: tell me what you hear ashore, and I'll decide whether you should pass it on to that German bastard. O.K?'

'Sure,' I called after him, as he went below. Then I considered his accusations.

Strauss could be my gun-runner, actual or potential. Lesnick had said the German was capable of any villainy, and Gordon had flatly accused him of smuggling drugs. As a scoundrel, Strauss was of little interest to me, but as a drug smuggler, owning a British-registered boat, he merited investigation, for the step from drugs to arms was not great.

Gordon's accusation that Lesnick was a cop amused me. What he meant, of course, was that Lesnick was a secret policeman, or intelligence agent. Outlaws feared policemen and did not differentiate between security agents who rarely hindered their larcenies and common informers who did. But some outlaws would tolerate security agents, especially if they were patriots like the Gordons', who constantly waved the flag and abused foreigners. Once I had heard Jim sum up this attitude by stating: 'The apes start at Calais.'

In Lesnick's case, they practised their toleration by not firing him and possibly felt as well such action might invite the attention of British intelligence. How they became suspicious of Lesnick was curious, for they knew him as a minor crook and ponce, or gigolo, and probably thought he had been coerced into working for the British I. S. It would never occur to them that such a capitalist parasite might be a communist agent.

Gordon's reference to the Mafia drug trade recalled me to that part of my assignment. Despite their aversion to common police work, British intelligence were interested in the routes by which the narcotics went from Sicily to the United States. Such interest puzzled me unless a link existed between drugs and arms, the latter being a security matter. The link might be Strauss, though I had no definite leads to the arms connection. Nevertheless, I was on fruitful ground: I might object to police work, but never to uncovering drug smugglers.

Harvey had told me in Gibraltar what was known of this traffic based on opium from the poppy fields of Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, and Iran. The opium was imported under

government supervision or smuggled into Italy, where it was refined into heroin either by large drug firms or by clandestine chemists. Under Italian law, the legitimate refining was supposed to be regulated by the government, but Italian business executives had formed an alliance with Mafia chieftains, or dons, to evade the law and make huge profits.

Among several Italians who had been uncovered in recent years as allies of the Mafia were three respected executives of different drug concerns. One of them had supplied at least seven hundred and seventy pounds of heroin, worth \$25,000,000 to the American Mafia dons and \$175,000,000 after further adulteration by the actual drug peddlers. Although the effects of the drug on the mental and physical health of addicts are incalculable, police have estimated that \$150,000 of property is stolen daily in New York city by junkies to pay for their shots in the mainline. Also it is stated that about seventy-five per cent of all major robberies in the United States are committed by addicts.

After refining, the heroin is stored in Genoa or Palermo, awaiting shipment to the United States. From the northern port, it is taken by seamen who hand it over on the New York docks to longshoremen belonging to Mafia-dominated unions. From Palermo, it was thought until recently, individual couriers returned to the United States with the heroin on their persons or in their luggage. Since public opinion in Italy and diplomatic pressure from Washington had demanded that the Italian police halt the racket, new routes had been established by the Mafia, one of them suspected of being via the Tangier-based cigarette smugglers. But no one had a clue to the identity of the smugglers or how or where the drugs left the boats.

Lunch was dismal, for Cookie had concocted a gelatinous mixture of fried cod and flour, followed by bully beef croquettes, thin mashed potatoes, and white beans hopefully masquerading with tomatoes and onions, but burned crisply. Rounding off the travesty were soapy processed cheese and boiled tea.

'Sewer-pipe trout again,' said Birdie, looking at the cod. 'Jesus, I'm going to quit unless that bastard is fired. What's next? I'll get out and walk, if he gives us chopped air gunner again.'

'What's chopped air gunner?' asked Gordon.

'RAF slang for that wartime mortadella.'

'Ah, yes,' said Gordon. 'We called it horse-cock. Don't tell me he serves that?'

'You're damned right he does!'

'We don't get it on the Fairmile and we cater for both boats. I'll look into it.'

'Thank Christ for that! You'll probably find the larcenous bastard is flogging the caviar and pâté your generous brother gives us. You know, it's a break feeding one of you Gordons with this slop. You'll realize just how badly we eat.'

Later, Cookie looked in at us. 'How do you like those beans, fellows? It's an old Parisian recipe.'

'Run 'em through the cat again!' snapped Birdie.

Cookie glared at him, then turned to the skipper. 'I've got a great idea for you, Skip, if we can raise the lolly.'

Cookie's schemes were invariably mad but a pleasant diversion from eating his meals. With a wink at the rest of us, the skipper said: 'O.K, let's hear it.'

'There's a BOAC Comet down in the Sahara, and I know where it is.'

'How do you know?'

'I was talking to a Frenchman in a Tangier bar, and he used to be with an oil survey outfit in the Sahara. They found this Comet, but couldn't do anything about it, since they only had a couple of light trucks. But they kept it secret, and no one else knows except me.'

'How the hell could you talk to a Frenchman, you ignorant sod?' laughed Birdie. 'You can hardly speak English.'

'You forget I was in the Foreign Legion.'

Birdie exploded: 'I wish to Jesus I could! But get on with it.'

'Well, this Frenchman said the engines were in top shape, and I want to bring them to Tangier.'

'When did the plane crash?'

'About four years ago.'

'The engines'll be in fine shape now.'

'No, no. You forget how dry it is in the Sahara. I want to raise enough money to outfit an expedition.'

Birdie hooted: 'Even if there is a Comet, how are you going to find it? You got a secret map?'

'Of course. And don't forget: I know how to make out in the desert. When I was in the Legion . . .'

'Stow that! What are you going to do with the engines?'

'Sell two to pay expenses and install the others aboard.'

'You're barking mad!'

'Why not? You've got Rolls Royce Merlins now, and they were used on Spitfires during the war. Why not Rolls Royce jets from a Comet? It's progress.'

Birdie was grinning widely. 'Where would you put them? Not in the engine room, I hope, because they'd burn out the ass-end of the boat.'

'Of course not! I'd put one on either side of the deck-house.'

'Mother of God!' gasped Birdie.

'What speed do you think we'd do?' asked the skipper.

'About one hundred and twenty knots. We'd get from Tangier to Sicily in eight hours.'

'Man, that'd be living!' said Birdie. 'At that speed, we'd eat less of your grub.'

'It might not work,' said the skipper. 'Gordon wants me as captain, and I haven't got a pilot's licence.'

'And there's the expense of the space helmets,' said Birdie. 'Gordon's pretty mean.'

'But think of the speed . . .' started Cookie, then trailed off, as he looked at our grinning faces. 'Aw, go to hell!' he muttered, storming into the galley.

'Was he serious?' asked Gordon.

'Sure,' said Birdie. 'He's right around the bend. But it's our only recreation, so we encourage him.'

Late in the afternoon, I was on the bridge, when I heard a single engine piston aircraft. I spotted it, watched it pass a half-mile to port, then alter course to fly directly overhead. I rang the alarm bell.

'What's up?' asked the skipper, when he joined me.

'Is that a spotter?' I said, pointing at the plane, now circling us.

'Can you see the markings?'

'No, I can't steady the glasses.'

'Get Birdie up here.'

When I returned with the engineer, I saw the plane flying to the east.

'Birdie,' said the skipper, 'that plane may be a spotter. He circled us a couple of times and may now be fetching the patrol boat. Get the central engine on half-ahead and stand by to have all three flat out.'

I took the wheel and steered west, while the skipper shot the sun. Half-an-hour later, the plane returned, then disappeared to the southeast.

'Steer northwest,' ordered the skipper.

— Soon Lesnick relieved me, but I stayed on deck. After another half-hour, the plane flew over us again. The skipper waited until we lost sight of it to the south, then said: 'Head east.'

Twenty-five minutes later, we saw the plane circling to the northwest before the pilot spotted us. He came down to about one hundred feet, and we could see him clearly, as he swept over us, talking into a microphone. He stayed nearby, apparently under orders to circle us until the patrol boat arrived.

'How far are we off Sicily?' I asked the skipper.

'About sixty miles. But if you're thinking about international law, forget it. They picked me up once about sixty-five miles offshore, but I had a ball.'

'What happened?'

'I had just flogged the last cigarette and started back to Tangier, when the buggers came alongside. I forgot to tell you we had a pal of Birdie's aboard, a radio operator with BEA. He'd been holidaying in Gib and met Birdie in a pub. He thought it'd be fun to make a trip with us, and I let him.

'When we sighted the patrol boat from our Fairmile, Birdie, the radio operator, and I went below and got into our best clothes. The BEA bloke actually sported a public school blazer, white flannels, and a yacht club hat. Birdie wore a suit and tie, and I had on clean slacks, an ascot, and a sports shirt.'

Pausing, he laughed at the memory, then continued: 'When the Ities came alongside, the BEA man was at the bow, yelling at them to buzz off and leave his chartered yacht. Naturally, they paid no attention and put an armed man aboard us. The BEA man knocked him into the sea with an oar and shouted about piracy on the high seas. The Ities fished their man out of the drink and were quite put out, because he'd lost his carbine. The next time they came alongside, they fired some shots over us and put three men aboard. That night we were all in the nick in Palermo and screaming for the British consul.

'He showed up, expecting the usual meek bums they pick up on these contrabanders, but found instead three highly indignant and articulate yachtsmen. He backed us out of perversity, and the Ities were so stunned, they freed us. So we flew out of the country. But I don't think anyone could get away with that yarn again.'

He chuckled, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. 'You know, it taught me one thing about their methods. If there's not much swell, they come alongside to transfer the boarding party. You see those sharpened lengths of railway rails on deck?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Well, the sharp ends extend outboard three feet, and can be locked rigid. The fittings are all braced below. You can see what might happen to a thin-skinned hull rubbing against those sharp rails.'

He laughed: 'Just think what it might do at night . . . By Christ, I'd love to sink an Itie patrol boat!'

I shuddered inwardly, but laughed with him. 'By the way, what happened to the boat after you beat it?'

'They had second thoughts and confiscated it. Hell, you can't get away with everything. Say, what's that plane up to?'

The spotter plane was flying towards us and losing altitude as it approached. Then we heard its labouring engine. A wide grin covered the skipper's face. 'Good show! I think the bastard's going in!'

I soon realized he was right unless the plane's engine picked up immediately.

'I'll take the wheel,' said the skipper. 'Robert and Joe, free the davit and get the dinghy outboard. Don't forget the oars. I'll head into the wind, but there isn't much else I can do for him.'

From the bow, Tony had sized up our actions and yelled: 'You crazy or something, Captain? You're not going to pick that bastard up?'

'Afraid I am, Tony. You keep out of sight while he's on deck and stay up here when he's below.'

'Let me knife him,' growled Tony. 'I spit on the bastard cops!'

'Shut up and stay out of sight,' barked the skipper. 'Above all, don't speak Italian.'

'O.K, you're the boss, but you must be crazy or something!'

The pilot had seen our manoeuvre, waved in acknowledgement, then banked so that he would come up parallel to us. When he was on the starboard quarter and about fifty feet off, he stalled the plane and dropped down on the calm sea. He opened the cabin door, inflated his Mae West, and stepped into the water.

'O.K, Robert,' ordered the skipper, 'go get him.'

Lesnick and I lowered the dinghy, and I dropped over the side into it. I rowed over and spun the dinghy around, presenting its stern to the pilot, and motioned to him to climb over. He grabbed the transom and scrambled in. He tried to shake my hand, nearly capsizing us until I pushed him down into the stern. Since he

had pulled himself into the dinghy, he was obviously uninjured except for some facial cuts. Meanwhile, the cabin and fuselage of the plane were almost awash; it would sink shortly.

'Speak English?' I asked, as I rowed back.

'Yes,' he replied with hardly any accent. 'Thanks a lot.'

'Thank the skipper,' I said. 'Some of the crew didn't want to pick you up.'

He laughed without much conviction, and I continued: 'Don't push your luck, chum. One of them wanted to slice you up.'

His face tightened, but he said nothing. I sympathized with him, for the Italian press carried lurid tales of the Tangier contrabanders. The pilot might doubt these embroideries, but would have no desire to determine their accuracy.

He climbed on deck and was taken below by the skipper, while Lesnick and I got the dinghy aboard. When the skipper rejoined us, he smiled at me: 'What did you tell that pilot? He's a bit windy.'

'That one of the boys wanted to shiv him. Why?'

'Well, he half-believed you. I reassured him, by saying we weren't going to do anything just yet. Then Cookie got in the act with a tale of Arab torture he underwent when he was in the Legion. It was so phoney, I had to laugh, and the Itie joined in. I left them exchanging lies and drinking that toilet cleaner Cookie calls coffee. He's such a cornball, he made the Itie sit on a case of cigarettes.'

We had three hours before the rendezvous, and the skipper ordered Lesnick to head east, then, later, south. Just before sunset, he determined our position and calculated our drift, and we went at three-quarter speed to a position from which we could drift on to the rendezvous. The skipper was certain he had kept the patrol boat at a distance where its radar would not reveal us. The position of the rendezvous was changed and the time advanced to nine o'clock, for we had to take aboard four hundred and forty gallons of petrol and one hundred and fifty cases of cigarettes.

We met the Fairmile on schedule, and our skipper rowed the airman over and returned with eight cases of cigarettes. The fifty-five-gallon drums of petrol were lowered over the side of the Fairmile and pulled to us on ropes. We hoisted the drums on the davit, and Pierre used a hand-pump to transfer the fuel to our tanks. The empty drum was then lashed at the stern.

'Show Robert how I want it done,' said the skipper to Lesnick, when the first drum had been emptied.

'Why's he so particular?' I asked Lesnick. 'Why not throw them over the side? If they took charge during a gale . . .'

Lesnick was well-enough disposed to reply: 'Hell, you should know him by now. He keeps them here so we can drop them if we're chased at night by the wops. They probably wouldn't see the drums, and one or more might go clear through their hull.'

To transfer the cigarettes, the dinghies of both boats were used, Tony, Lesnick, and I splitting the chore in ours. It was an hour-and-a-half before the petrol was in our tanks and the cigarettes lashed down below. The Fairmile also sent us some fresh fish, lettuce, tomatoes, and a basket of grapes.

'Where did you get it?' I asked, taking the food from the mate of the Fairmile.

'A fisherman took fifty cases from us today,' he replied, 'and sold it to us.'

'Where's Strauss?'

'Down the coast in his own boat, working near Messina with a fishing fleet . . . Well, that seems to be your lot. Bon voyage.'

'See you tomorrow,' I grinned up at him, happy that I would be ashore during tomorrow's rendezvous.

Chapter 6

When Cape Gallo was on the beam, Gordon called me off the bridge. 'Got your passport and cash? That's all you'll need.'

'No toothbrush?'

'No, they supply everything, sometimes even popsies. If you do latch on to one, don't speak Italian.'

'Why cash? The broad?'

'No. In case something goes wrong, and we have to run for it.'

'Now you tell me.'

'It's unlikely. I've been doing this for three years, and nothing's happened yet.'

I helped Gordon toss the cigarettes ashore, while Tony replaced me below. When the last case was on the mole, Gordon said: 'O.K, we're off.'

We sat on top of the wine tanker and went through the port gates after a perfunctory check by customs officers. The tanker was driven into a warehouse, about a mile from the docks, where Gordon was greeted by a man standing beside a taxi. We left in it immediately for the suburbs. Since the locations of Mafia hideouts did not interest me, I made no effort to memorize our route. The taxi dropped us outside a large house surrounded by a garden, and we walked to the door, which was opened soon after Gordon rang the bell.

'Hi, Bob,' said a dapper, squat man in his fifties, motioning us inside.

'Hello, Nick. This is my first mate, Robert Belcourt. Nick Miranda.'

'Glad to know you, Robert.'

In Gibraltar, Harvey had described the typical Mafia don, who

had been expelled from the United States as a criminal alien and who now dealt in drugs from Palermo. It was Miranda from the top of his neatly barbered head to his polished black shoes. His tropical suit was conservatively cut of sober material, and his tie quiet. His New York accent was not unattractive, since the timbre was low and apparently keyed to warmth and charm. This façade could be shed immediately, I knew, for what I faced was the modern hoodlum, teathed and schooled in American big city rackets and directed to underplay his role by the super-boss, Lucky Luciano. It was Charlie Lucky who rid the gangsters of their flamboyant appearance and rasping, aggressive manner. Now, they resembled hard-faced, neatly dressed businessmen, no longer on the verge of ostentatiously eating their young.

'Grab a seat, boys,' said Miranda, 'and have a drink. Scotch do? . . . Fine. I expect you're hungry, so we'll eat soon. I know Bob likes wop cooking, but what about you, Robert?'

'Great, thanks. Anything'll do. Don't worry about me; I'm just a plain meat-and-potato man.'

I had to strive for inanity and insignificance, though anyone, even 'a meat-and-potato man', has definite opinions about food. Fifteen minutes later, we were seated in Miranda's rich and tasteful dining room, as two maids flitted about and as candle-light played over dark, polished wood, heavy sterling, and crystal. Four aristocrats sneered at us from centuries' old paintings. I doubted that they were Miranda's ancestors: they would have been obliged to horse-whip him on sight.

Miranda ate little, explaining he had dined several hours earlier. I knew from experience we were served only the best of regional dishes and wines, as Miranda emphasized with his commentary on the qualifications and wages of his cook and the prices of the ingredients. We had a *pasta* cooked with fennel, sardines, raisins, pine nuts, anchovies, and saffron. Although served cold, it was excellent and was complemented by a rich red *Faro*. Next was a local *fritto misto*, with which we drank a dry white *Corvo*. Dessert was the Sicilian *cassata*, a multi-hued

cheese cake, with chocolate and candied fruit, and accompanied by the inevitable *Marsala*.

I said little, munching and gulping the first decent food and wine I had been offered since leaving Tangier. But Miranda's hard eyes rarely left me, and I realized I had to contribute more than a few chuckles at my companions' bawdy stories. Making some salty references to a London background of petty larceny, I said I had fled to Tangier, where my marine and engineering training had qualified me for a job with the Gordons.

What had worried Miranda was my accent. To him, I was an American and potentially suspect, since he rightly feared American narcotics agents. Because most of them were of Italian or Sicilian origin, I could expect him to try to unmask my knowledge of Italian. Early in the meal, he demanded my passport, frankly stating he wanted to check it against my account of myself. As a Canadian petty criminal, I should not interest him, but I could never forget with whom I was dealing. Harvey had quoted American authorities as saying that most Mafia thugs had 'an I. Q. of 10 and a quotient of cunning and viciousness of 160'. Miranda would never determine why I was interested in him, but I could expect some rugged moments, should he decide I was a spy. Although now reassured and joking, he still did not laugh with his eyes.

Pleasantly stuffed with food and warmed by the good wines, I was slumped in my chair, listening to Miranda direct the maid to serve coffee in the salon. Without pausing, he turned to me and said in Italian: 'How about Drambuie, Robert?'

Although I had been expecting the probe, it took considerable effort to present a blank face. 'What's that, Nick?' I replied.

He laughed. 'Yeah, I forgot. I asked you if you wanted Drambuie with your coffee.'

Christ almighty, sewer-rats drinking Bonnie Prince Charlie's secret nectar! 'What is it, Nick? If it's more of that screech, I'd prefer scotch.'

'O.K., scotch it is,' he snickered. 'What you call screech is the best wine in Sicily. You should steal what it cost me to stock my

cellar. These wops are bigger thieves than your Canadian booze runners during prohibition.'

'Sure, sure, Nick,' I fawned, 'it's great, but I'm just a plain meat-and-potato man, whisky is more to my liking.'

'Would you prefer Canadian rye?'

'Anything at all, Nick. All whisky's the same to me.'

Over coffee, I belched and yawned widely several times. I was amused to note the belch brought a flicker of distaste to Miranda's features, while the yawns kindled similar responses in both the Sicilian and Gordon.

'I guess you boys want to hit the hay,' said Miranda. 'Anyway, we're going to discuss business before lunch tomorrow. So I'll send someone up to shave you at about noon. That O.K.?'

'Sure,' laughed Gordon. 'The usual forty-twenty-thirty-five, I hope.'

'But naturally,' smiled Miranda. 'Hell, I forgot to install the mirrors you asked for the last time.'

'Not to worry,' said Gordon, then seeing my vacant grin, added: 'Robert doesn't understand what we're talking about. Let it be a surprise, eh, Nick?'

'Sure. And I bet it'll be the pleasantest he's had in years. Well, good night, boys. See you tomorrow. The maid'll show you to your rooms. But no funny stuff. She's old enough to be your grandmother.'

A uniformed crone took us upstairs to two adjoining rooms and left. Before he said good night, Gordon showed me around both rooms. Each was luxuriously furnished, especially with a huge double bed, and had a bathroom.

'Enjoy the bed,' he grinned, 'and come and get me after you're shaved and dressed.'

I felt some precautions were necessary, though I did not really expect intruders. In intelligence jargon, it was not 'a safe house'. By peering out of the recessed window, I learned my room was on the first floor with a window directly above mine and with a drop to the garden of about twenty feet. The bathroom window was not large enough to admit a small boy.

I took a fish-hook and line from my pocket and sank the barb in the wooden skirting board on one side of the recess leading to the window. Paying out the line across the recess, I made it fast to a chair, about six inches above the floor. Then I unscrewed a lamp bulb and placed it on the seat of the chair with two glasses from the bathroom.

Hidden inside my trousers was a sheath containing a razor-sharp knife, a marlin-spike, and a gadget combining in one instrument an adjustable wrench, a chisel, and pliers. In the clothes cupboard, I found a hanger of thick wire and cut from it a one-foot length with the pliers. This I bent into the shape of a horseshoe and hooked on to the door handle with one arm extended through the ring of the key, which I had turned as far as it could go in the locked position. I put both the knife and marlin-spike under the pillows, got into bed, and almost immediately, fell asleep.

Waking at eleven, I removed the wire brace from the door key and the trip wire from the window recess. I sheathed the knife and marlin-spike, slipping them under my crumpled clothes on a chair, and lay back on the bed. I dozed off and was dreaming of Sandra Grant – or so I thought – when I was awakened by knocking.

On opening the door, I understood Gordon's allusion last night to 'the usual forty-twenty-thirty-five'. Actually, the figures could be doubled, for two young, buxom women were smiling at me, each at one end of a wheeled barber's chair. On the chair were a basin containing a straight razor, a strop, soap, and two shaving brushes.

'We-shave-you,' one enunciated slowly in English.

'Come right in, girls,' I grinned, bowing them into the room. 'Surely you can do better than that?'

Giggling at my undershorts, they wheeled the chair by me and into the bathroom. Each was wearing a sheer negligee, which clung tightly across their plump, jiggling breasts and swaying buttocks. Their glossy, black hair hung almost to their slender waists. I went to the bathroom door and watched them: one ran

hot water into the basin, then set the chair in a reclining position, while the other stropped the razor.

'Do you know how to use that?' I asked.

When they turned to me with inquiring looks, I said with gestures: 'You-know-how-to-use-that?'

'Sì, sì,' smiled the one with the razor. 'Come, Johnny, we ready.'

'That's obvious,' I said, entering the room. Unaffectedly, they took off their negligees and stood facing me, the nipples of their full breasts rising and subsiding, as the garments went over their heads. 'No-get-wet,' one explained. 'You also, Johnny.'

'I'll be your guest any time,' I said.

After I removed my undershorts and lay back on the chair, both worked on my face with their lathered brushes. Then as one used the razor efficiently, the other performed certain massages not usually associated with shaving. Later, they bathed me in the tub and then led me to the bed. Throughout the bizarre interlude, they tried to trap me into replying in Italian, which, under the circumstances, proved an annoying distraction. At noon, I shoosed them from the room, dressed, then called on Gordon.

Lying on the bed, reading a mystery story, he grinned up at me. 'How did you like the shave, Johnny?'

'You too, eh?' I replied. 'The same pair? Jesus, they must lead a busy life, if Nick has many guests.'

'No, he's got half-a-dozen running around the place. Well, if you're ready, let's go downstairs.'

Nick greeted us: 'Well boys, after that shave, you probably need a real breakfast. You'll find everything in the dining room. But don't eat too much, because we'll have lunch at two. We'll get down to business after you've had breakfast.'

In accord with his squire-like pretensions, Nick had organized a real sideboard: chilled fruit juices and breakfast cereals were beside hot trays holding dishes of eggs, bacon, kidneys, fish, hashed brown potatoes, and toast.

'What no kippers nor kedgerees?' I asked.

'What's that?' barked Nick, his condescending smile wiped off by what he sensed might be an affront to his hospitality.

'Just kidding,' I grovelled quickly. 'It's what we eat every morning on that bloody boat.'

'Oh, Limey grub! No, no, all you'll find here is good American food.'

He stayed to supervise, counselling us to eat the more expensive bacon and kidneys and scolding a maid unnecessarily for not having kept the grapefruit juice ice-cold and the toast hot. Actually they were at the right temperatures. When the woman poured coffee, Nick pointed out: 'That's not wop coffee, boys; that's real American Maxwell House right off the boats here. I have to pay those grafting stewards, but it's worth it. I wouldn't drink anything else for breakfast.'

We ate modestly, and Nick sighed as the table was cleared while we drank coffee. 'What a waste of food,' he said. 'You know, all that grub you didn't eat will probably be thrown out, because the staff won't eat American for breakfast. And, of course, they want wop grub for lunch. It's expensive, but it's worth it if you boys are satisfied.'

'Just great, Nick!' I came in on cue. 'Man, that's really living.'

The maid whispered to him, and he said: 'The boss is here; let's go.'

We followed him into the living room, where he greeted effusively a shrivelled, sun-blackened peasant, who was unmoved by the performance. I was reminded of a buzzard, its beady eyes glued to some doubtful garbage. He was clad in a black hat, frayed white shirt buttoned to the neck and without a tie, shiny black suit, and dusty black boots. What he found dubious was me, and his eyes never left me, as he dismissed Miranda without a word, then limply shook hands with Gordon.

'Glad to see you again, Mr Tocco,' blurted the usually impassive Scot. 'I want you to meet my mate, Robert Belcourt.'

'Don't let the old bastard throw you,' said Nick to me before translating Gordon's introduction into Italian.

I shook a dry claw-like hand and looked into an expressionless

face and two reptilian eyes. Tocco said nothing, as he stared at me. I grinned: 'Please to meet you, Mr Tocco. If you had anything to do with the broads and the food here, I'd like to thank you. Yes, sir, I haven't had better in months.'

This was accurately translated into Italian by Nick, who added: 'He's nothing, Reno. I checked him out: he's no Uncle Angelo, just a Canadian punk on the run from the English law. He doesn't speak Italian.'

Tocco rasped: 'O.K, if you say so, but don't let him out of the house and don't let him know where it's located.'

Nick turned to me. 'He says you're welcome. Any friend of Gordon's is a friend of his.'

Nick was apparently satisfied that I was no Uncle Angelo, Mafia slang, I knew, for a policeman. But Tocco was different, for he was a 'Moustache Pete', a don in the older tradition. He could never trust anyone not Sicilian-born and, therefore, ungrounded since birth in Mafia traditions, especially that of *omertà*, or silence. Miranda, however, had lived in the United States, where many hoodlums, even Al Capone, were not members of the brotherhood because of their birth outside Sicily. Consequently, he accepted me as a minor crook, useful to his plans. But Tocco was unconvinced. Fortunately, however, he believed I did not speak Italian.

Then, with Nick translating, they discussed a possible increase in the volume of cigarettes being brought from Tangier. Tocco wanted to distribute more at a lower price and felt the smugglers might cut costs, if they had two fast boats, the other working in the Naples area. Gordon called upon me twice to back him with some technical information about petrol consumption and engine maintenance. The problems were elementary, but I replied verbosely, trying to make my contributions sound important.

Eventually, Tocco and Nick concluded with a promise, contracting to buy in escrow through a Swiss bank a year's supply of cigarettes, should the smugglers operate two fast boats. Gordon said he would confer in Tangier with his smuggling

associates about a lower price for the cigarettes. So far, I had learned nothing except that contrabanders talk like other businessmen.

Nick was pouring drinks, when Tocco said to him: 'Is the German mixed up with these two?'

'They bring in some of his cigarettes, but that's all.'

'I thought he owned a piece of the boat.'

'He does, but they only work together on cigarettes.'

'Then they're not in partnership on the other things.'

'Hell no. I tried to deal first with Gordon, but he turned me down.'

Tocco nodded. 'Ah yes, you did too. I remember now.'

'Sure, Gordon wouldn't have anything to do with it. Got quite angry, in fact. That's the trouble with these small-timers.'

'Well, how do we get that out to Strauss?' Tocco had gestured to a parcel, wrapped in brown paper, tied with white cord, and two feet long, one foot wide, and six inches deep. The parcel seemed to contain cylinders, for its paper surface was moulded to the slightly wavy outline of its contents.

'We can send word to him through these two,' said Nick. 'He'll have to come ashore.'

As soon as the pair had started in Italian, Gordon crossed to me with a book he had taken from a shelf. 'Great bit of pornography, this, Robert,' he said. We bent over it, and I affected close interest, as he leafed through the photographs.

'O.K,' Tocco was saying, 'I want to see him anyway about his new business with the Yugoslavs. I don't like it.'

'Yeah, we'd lose a shipment, if the French caught him. It's too good a route to wreck because of his greed.'

'Tell them I want to see Strauss as soon as possible,' concluded Tocco.

Soon, Nick took us into the dining room for lunch, which started with spaghetti and a plain tomato sauce and grated cheese. He said it was Tocco's favourite dish and urged us to learn 'how these rube wops eat and sound'. Between Tocco's plate and mouth, a continuous chain of spaghetti moved, con-

trolled by a guiding fork and sucking motions. While we continued with a *caponato*, a Sicilian mixture of crayfish, squid, onions, eggplant, and celery, Tocco absorbed two more plates of *pasta*.

Tocco left us with barely civil farewells, and Nick told us we were free until dinner at eleven o'clock, after which we would be driven to the port.

'If you want another shave,' he grinned, 'I'll send the barbers round at about nine. They're resting now and should be frisky by then.'

'Sure,' said Gordon, 'why not?'

I nodded in agreement and, later, followed him upstairs with several mystery stories. I read, then fell asleep, and awakened to find the same lovely barbers climbing into either side of the bed. They had not exhausted their repertoire and kept me diverted until we showered together. Gordon and I dined with Nick and were driven to the docks. When the torpedo boat pulled into its berth beside the barges, we helped unload the cigarettes and were aboard on her departure.

When we were out of the harbour, Gordon took me into the deck-house and, pouring drinks, said: 'O.K, what were they talking about?'

'Nothing much about you or your brother or even cigarettes. It was all about Strauss.'

'Yes?'

'Tocco thought you would deliver something to Strauss, and Nick said you wouldn't.'

Gordon nodded. 'Drugs, eh?'

'They didn't say.'

'Where were the drugs?'

'I don't know.'

'What else did they say? They spoke longer than that.'

'Well, it started off with Tocco thinking you, your brother, and Strauss were mixed up in this. Nick said you two weren't, and that your brother got angry at even being approached.'

That's all, except the message for Strauss he gave you.'

'You're not holding out, are you?'

'Christ no. Why the hell should I? I'm a script writer; I don't give a good God damn what you're all up to!'

'All right, all right,' he grinned, his hands making the Latin placatory motions. 'They seemed to be talking a lot, and I was wondering . . .'

I interrupted angrily: 'You can bloody well stop wondering!'

'Sure, sure. Look, for your own good, I'd forget the whole thing. After all, you just said you were a script writer . . .'

'Don't worry, I will! I couldn't care less about cigarettes, but the other I don't want to know. One more thing: what do I tell Strauss?'

'Exactly what you told me.'

'Do I tell him you questioned me?'

He shrugged. 'You've got to, but play dumb about the drugs. As you said, you don't want to know.'

I grinned. 'Sure. Well, thanks a lot for taking me ashore. That first shave was right out of the Olympia Press, and the other did a lot for my five o'clock shadow.'

He shook his head. 'You're wrong you know. Those poppies could give lessons to the Olympia Press boys.'

He held up his glass, intoning solemnly: 'Here's to better shaving.'

We touched glasses and drank, after which I went on deck.

The next morning, Lesnick got me away from the rest of the crew and, smiling amiably, opened with: 'You get all the breaks, Robert. How come Gordon took you ashore?'

Earlier I had weighed my answers in this probable interrogation and chosen calculated frankness. 'I speak Italian,' I said, 'and Strauss wanted someone to eavesdrop on those Ities ashore. He didn't want anyone to know why I was going and still doesn't, with Tony aboard. So do me a favour and keep it quiet.'

'Sure, Robert, like a tomb. But what did Strauss want to know?'

'I was just to listen carefully. The Ities talked between themselves about a parcel like this –' I motioned with my hands to indicate the dimension: – they wanted delivered to Strauss. That was all, except I ate well and got laid.'

'They didn't say anything else about Strauss, did they?'

'Nothing that I caught.'

'You heard nothing about Yugoslavs?'

'No, just the parcel. In the end, they gave Gordon a message for Strauss that he was to come ashore. Say, what's with the Yugoslavs?'

He waved a hand negligently. 'Oh, just a new gang of contrabanders trying to horn in on the racket at cut rates.'

'That'll please the Gordons.'

'Yeah,' he said, then looking at me carefully, asked: 'What do you think was in the parcel?'

'Drugs.'

He started. 'Drugs! Why drugs?'

'Gordon said so.'

He produced cigarettes, offering me one and lighting it. 'So Gordon thinks that lousy kraut is running drugs?'

'Knows, not thinks. He told me before we went ashore.' I grinned at him. 'He also told me not to tell you.'

He smiled tightly. 'He did, did he? Why?'

I laughed. 'He thinks you're too curious – that you might be a cop. Are you?'

His surprise was genuine. 'Well, I'll be damned! Christ no, I'm not a lousy, stinking cop! I'm just curious about ways of making a buck. Where does Gordon think the drugs are going?'

'He didn't say and neither did the Ities.'

'Well, pal, thanks for the information. Look, I'll keep quiet about you, if you keep quiet about my curiosity.'

'Fine. But why are you curious?'

He grinned. 'Like I told you: I'm interested in making a buck.'

'Are you any wiser?'

His grin became wider, then he turned and walked off, saying: 'Maybe I am. Maybe I am.'

After we arrived that night at the rendezvous with the Fairmile, Strauss came aboard and immediately called me aft. We were alone, since the crew were loading cigarettes for'ard.

'Right, Belcourt,' he said brusquely, 'what have you got for me?'

'Have you talked with Gordon?'

'No, I'm paying you, not him.'

'Tocco wants you to go ashore. He's got something for you, which he wanted to give to Gordon, but Miranda vetoed the idea. So you've got to fetch it.'

'What is it?'

'I don't know.'

'You're sure?'

I could not see his eyes clearly in the dark, but the threat was strong in the tone of his voice. I said evenly: 'No, no idea.'

'When did they discuss this?'

'Gordon, Miranda, and Tocco had finished talking about smuggling more cigarettes. Up to then, Miranda had translated everything into English. After this exchange about you, all he said to Gordon was that they wanted to see you.'

'So Gordon knows about it?'

'Sure, Miranda spoke to him in English.'

'Does Gordon know the rest – what you've just told me?'

'Yeah.'

His reaction was immediate. 'What! You told him?'

'Yeah, he asked me.'

'You stupid fool!' he barked. I could see his clenched right fist at his thigh in his typical reaction to anger with a subordinate, but he controlled the impulse and spat out: 'That's not what I was paying you for, you fool!'

I could see a figure, coming aft behind Strauss. It looked like Lesnick.

'Listen, you German son-of-a-bitch,' I grated, 'you're not tending your gas ovens any more!'

Strauss's roar of rage in German was suddenly cut off, as the man behind grabbed him in a hammerlock and bent him back.

'Go ahead, Robert, shiv the kraut bastard!'

It was Lesnick. Strauss reacted immediately, hurling Lesnick into the port life-lines and charging me. In his blind rage, he tried to close with me. I was against the taffrail and met his charge with a knee to his groin. He grunted, his hands falling away from their quest for my neck. I pulled him forward by his shirt and butted him in the face.

He stumbled away. Lesnick leapt on him and chopped him across the back of the neck. Strauss collapsed. Lesnick kicked him in the groin several times, then paused, turning to me. 'Give me your knife, Robert. I lent mine.'

'Simmer down, Joe!'

'Jesus, there must have been hundreds who prayed to have Strauss like this! . . . Well, if you're too chicken, lend a hand to toss him over the side. If he doesn't make it, who's to worry!'

'For Christ's sake, simmer down! Look, he'll remember this beating for a long time. Why not leave it like that?'

'Yeah . . . Perhaps you're right . . . O.K, we'll do it your way.'

We walked for'ard and helped load cigarettes. Ten minutes later, Strauss stumbled up, obviously in considerable pain. Lesnick sneered: 'What happened, Strauss? You trip over a rope?'

He laughed loudly, as Strauss stood several feet from us. Before he let himself down slowly into a dinghy, he rasped: 'I'll get you two - and soon!'

'Get lost, you kraut bastard,' laughed Lesnick, and Strauss was rowed away.

I had finished the contraband part of my assignment, having uncovered leads pointing to Strauss as both an arms and drugs smuggler. The arms connection was tenuous and required development, since it was based on some association of Strauss's with unspecified Yugoslavs, a link threatened by French authorities, according to Tocco. I accepted Lesnick's knowledge of this association, but was puzzled by Tocco's, though a probable

explanation was that he had a spy aboard Strauss's boat.

After our brawl with Strauss, Lesnick was most genial towards me. We talked often, mainly about his past, but I learned nothing more from him of value to my assignment. We hatched a plot however, that might later pay me intelligence dividends. Whether Lesnick's enthusiastic support of my idea was made with the same ulterior motive, I never learned.

Strauss had sent word to Tocco that he would sail into Termini Imerese, a small port, twenty miles southeast of Palermo. While there, he apparently took the drugs aboard and lost his cook through desertion. Lesnick overheard him the next night complaining to our skipper. When Lesnick told me, I decided to take advantage of the desertion.

My sudden thought was that I might replace Cookie aboard our boat, while he joined Strauss. I had learned from Cookie's disjointed monologues that he had fuzzy ideas about helping the underdog and sympathized with the Algerian rebels. During an interview, Strauss would probably uncover these sentiments and might plan to exploit them by hiring him. Although I hated the prospect of working in the galley, I was taking a long-term gamble on Cookie's garrulity. Since I baited him least of our crew, he considered me his only friend aboard and might later confide details of any arms smuggling operations.

Lesnick agreed that I could never be as inept as Cookie and that we would saddle Strauss with a shocking bore and indigestible food. Terming my idea an inspiration, he rushed me to our skipper, to whom he practically described the proposal as his own. As an incentive to Strauss, I suggested he be encouraged to consider me an incompetent seaman, for he could then gloat over my relegation to the galley.

Two days later, Cookie was transferred, while Strauss made derisive comments on my inadequacies. With much laughter, we sailed off and took a seaman aboard from the Fairmile to replace me on deck. Formerly, I had only to cope with the lack of creature comforts aboard; now I had volunteered for what I knew from experience to be the worst job on a small boat. Added

to the dirt, shortage of fresh water, and cramped, dank sleeping quarters, I now had to suffer the humid heat of the galley, the greasy stink, and the preparation of three meals daily for upwards of eight men. Although I have never been seasick, I become queasy afloat when confined in a galley. Cooking is a melancholy task, for the inevitable stews slop out of the pots, despite fiddles and wedges, either burning the cook's hands and legs or congealing on the deck. If it is the latter, the cook may also lose his footing and fall on to the stove or against a bulkhead with sharp projections.

We stayed 'on station' for another five weeks, making eighteen runs ashore, most of them into Palermo and the rest into Termini Imerese. Before the Fairmile towed us west, we landed twenty-seven million cigarettes and two hundred cases of scotch whisky, the latter carried as deck cargo. We unloaded Gordon's Fairmile twice, for it made the round trip to Tangier in the interim, most of Strauss's cargo, and that of four Corsican-owned craft. It was probably the biggest smuggling operation into Sicily in any six-week period since the racket started. Directed by the Mafia, suborned officials and fishermen drew the patrol boats away from whatever area we worked and made every trip, except the sixteenth, uneventful.

On that trip, we were heading out from Termini Imerese, when a patrol boat overtook us. It fired warning shots and, as we increased speed, blazed away with small calibre automatic weapons. Until we had surged away, our bridge was raked by bullets. The skipper stayed at the wheel, yelling at Lesnick, who was on lookout, to get below until we were out of range. When the engines roared, I jumped out of my bunk and ran up on deck. I stood with Lesnick forward of the deck-house, as he told me what had happened. Soon, the patrol boat fell back, and we joined the skipper.

'Take the wheel, Joe,' he ordered. 'Robert, you come below with me.'

Before we left the bridge, he signalled for half-speed on all engines. 'Flat out,' he ordered, 'if he catches up.'

Below, he told me to break out the first aid kit.

'Are you hit?' I asked.

'Don't ask stupid questions!' he snapped.

When I opened the kit, he reached into it and handed me the tweezers. 'You'll find something above and behind my right ear. Pull it out. It's probably a bullet.'

'Are you sure you know what you're doing?' I said. 'I'll do it, but . . .'

'Shut up, and pull it out.'

Fortunately, it was a spent bullet that had just broken the skin, or so my wartime first aid training indicated. I removed it and handed it to him. 'Better keep it as a souvenir,' I said. 'Bloody few people ever get a bullet in the head and can talk about it.'

I shaved the hair around the wound, disinfected it, and applied a dressing. Meanwhile, the skipper had filled a hypodermic syringe with penicillin. When I was through, he stripped off his pants and underwear and lay across the chart table.

'Shove this in the fleshy part of my ass,' he said, handing me the syringe. He yelped when I pricked his skin, then continued: 'Robert, I may pass out from concussion. Get Birdie up here. He's skipper now, but you'll have to help him with the navigation. You'll find our course and the RV for tomorrow on the chart . . . Jesus, my head is starting to explode. Give me a hand to my bunk.'

Three days later, his headaches had so diminished he took command again and ran the boat until we had unloaded the last cigarette. Then we returned to Tangier.

Chapter 7

Cape Malabata, the eastern point of the bay of Tangier, was on our beam when we changed course for the port. We had been under our own power since the Fairmile left us to enter Gibraltar. It was eleven o'clock in the morning, and the sun shone brilliantly on the beach and the city that climbed the western slopes of the bay. To the right was the ancient and still partially walled old quarter, with its mosques and medieval, winding streets. On the left, the city had overflowed the walls and now encompassed straight boulevards and modern apartment blocks, mostly built after the last war. On the fringes of the modern city were dreadful shanty towns, inhabited by poor Arabs and constructed of scrap materials and sun-baked mud.

Unlike the slow contrabanders, we could make the passage through the Straits of Gibraltar in daylight without fear of interference from Spanish patrol boats. Angered by the massive quantities of goods smuggled by boat from Gibraltar, the Spanish authorities kept launches in nearby Algeciras and Tarifa, sending them out occasionally to pounce on the contraband boats.

I first saw Tangier during the war, when I sailed through the straits at night aboard a troop-ship, bound for the Sicilian invasion. After three years of the black-out in Britain, it was startling to see again the twinkling lights of a city. Tangier was neutral, and sovereignty of its international administration had been usurped by the Spanish in 1940. Just how neutral it was, I learned several months later, when I was posted to British intelligence in Gibraltar.

Agents of many intelligence services fereted away in Tangier,

frequently stumbling over themselves. Refugees fled there from Europe, many of them without funds and eager for any profitable intrigue. Arabs, neutral in everything except hatred of Europeans, sold their services indiscriminately. Active on intelligence or counter intelligence missions were the Nationalist Spanish, Loyalist Spanish, Portuguese, Vichy Frenchmen, Free Frenchmen, Russians, Americans, Britons, Germans, Italians, and Japanese, as well as Arabs, belonging to clandestine independence movements.

The Allies used Tangier mainly as a listening post, seeking information of occupied Europe, while the Germans and Italians strove to counter this activity and also observed Allied shipping in the straits. As a rule, circumspection was observed in the shedding of blood and taking of lives. Agents, traitors, and informers disappeared into the sea or were poisoned, since no one feared the unsophisticated forensic laboratories. But in retaliation for the Germans' exploding a mail sack on the Gibraltar ferry with the death of two British security guards, a lookout post over the straits was blown up, killing a German observer.

The British execution squad consisted of one very tough man, who lived like a pasha, leaving his scented Moorish quarters occasionally to perform his duties and dispose of the body. One traitor he never attended was an employee of the British consulate, who sold navicerts, or documents granting a ship's master unhindered passage through the cordon of British patrol boats in the straits. Shortly after his double-dealing was revealed, the traitor found his flat burgled and his cache of banknotes taken. He went mad, but escaped the executioner.

I made several trips to wartime Tangier and, before leaving Gibraltar, had to familiarize myself with one list of known enemy agents and another naming bars, restaurants, and hotels unfriendly to the Allies. Revision of the first list depended on the energy and caution of the agents, while the second changed frequently, as the owners' philosophies altered with the progress of the war or bribery.

On arrival, I was invariably followed by at least three Arabs,

who even slept in the garden of my hotel, shadowing me again whenever I left the premises. Several times I rid myself of two of them with a payment to each of about ten shillings, but the third was usually of sterner stuff and refused to depart even for a pound, whereupon other methods were used. Larger payments were inadvisable, because most Arabs happily took money from the unbeliever and rarely delivered. Indeed, we ran one, knowing he was also paid by two other services, for we learned from his reports misleading items the enemy wished to plant on us. Moreover, he might err one day in scaling the three envelopes and we would receive a report written for another I. S.

After the war, the International Administration resumed sovereignty until this year, when Morocco achieved independence. The powers administering Tangier were France, Spain Britain, Italy, Portugal, Belgium, and Holland, with a veto power held by the French and, to a lesser extent, the Spanish. Against such a confused background, immorality was accepted, even in the higher reaches of the administration. Many European civil servants had three loyalties: first, to themselves; secondly, to their nations; and, thirdly, to Tangier.

The economy was artificial, since no industry existed and no hinterland exported or imported goods, but the city flourished on banking, smuggling, tourists, and retired foreigners. Since Tangier enjoyed freedom of currency exchange, the banks thrived on arbitrage and the investments of Europeans. These investors evaded their own national currency regulations by smuggling capital to Tangier, where some of it was kept in gold bullion in bank vaults. Smuggling of cigarettes and other commodities was encouraged because of the lax administration and the free port. Despite the lack of a concerted campaign, tourists were attracted by the excellent climate, cheap prices, and good accommodation and restaurants. Some visitors became residents, for incomes were untaxed, and a large colony of foreign homosexuals existed on the Arab toleration of their perversions.

Tangier had an undeserved reputation of violence throughout the world, for despite the prevalence of rogues, its crime rate was

much lower than that of comparable cities. The police with their horde of informers dealt savagely with criminals, but could not prosecute smugglers and bankers, whose larcenies defrauded governments and people elsewhere. Grafting officials also escaped, for their activities have always been accepted in Arab countries, where office-holding is a licence to plunder public funds.

Admittedly, public and private morality were not highly esteemed, a situation that attracted many of the foreign lotus-eaters: tax dodgers, criminals on the run, under-age heiresses and their gigolos, drug addicts, alcoholics, jailbirds, and perverts. If, however, they misbehaved flagrantly or indulged in local crime, the police promptly prosecuted or expelled them.

We were inside the mole and headed for the yacht quay, where, normally, some two yachts and ten contrabanders might be found. The only berth was a narrow opening between a thirty-five-foot white ketch, flying the Blue Ensign, and a dirty grey contraband Fairmile. We dropped two hooks and went astern, pushing the two farther apart until we were snugly fitted in. Lesnick and I and one man on the ketch tried to fend off, but our automobile tyres left black streaks along the ketch's hull.

When our engines were stilled, our skipper yelled to the yacht crewman in his best public school accent: 'Sorry, old man, but I've got too much power to ease in slowly.'

It did not wipe the scowl off the man's face, and he snapped: 'why didn't you haul your scruffy tub in?'

'It would take too long,' smiled the skipper, 'and the boys want to get laid. But cheer up, I'll have those streaks off soon.'

The stranger relented. 'Well, I've never stood in the way of true love. Have a drink with me before you go ashore.'

'If I know this lot, it's commercial sin, not true love,' said Birdie, who had come on deck.

Within thirty minutes, we were cleared by the health authorities and police, and everything was shipshape. Jim Gordon drove on to the quay and joined the skipper in the deck-

house. He had paid the rest of the crew, though I received only a handshake and an invitation for drinks. Since a watchman had come aboard, the crew were free. I dressed in fairly clean but wrinkled sports shirt and slacks and bundled my clothing and gear into a kit-bag to fetch later.

I reasoned that Lesnick would contact the spy master soon to arrange a meeting and that I might get a clue to his identity. He readily agreed to join me for drinks and lunch.

'After the siesta hour,' he leered, 'I'll have to leave you. That's when the girl-friend's husband goes to work.'

When we arrived on deck, the crew member of the ketch was lounging against his life-lines with a glass in his hand.

'Care for that drink?' he asked.

'Sure,' said Lesnick, and we clambered over the life-lines and went below to the saloon.

The stranger introduced himself as Mike Rayburn and said he was the owner-skipper of the yacht. He had arrived in Tangier two weeks ago, liked it, and planned to stay longer before resuming his trip to the French Riviera. He showed us about his yacht, and we returned to the saloon.

'Six weeks at sea, eh?' he said. 'I won't ask you what you've been doing, but I can't say I'm not curious.'

'Better leave it at that,' said Lesnick. 'We wouldn't tell you anyway.'

'Sure,' he grinned. He got up, opened a drawer and took out a book. 'I like to get every visitor to sign the guest-book. You'll be the first brethren of the coast in it.'

He held out the book and a pen to Lesnick, and I was no longer disinterested.

'You're three hundred years out,' I said. 'We're respectable. We haven't even slit a throat or raped anyone yet.'

'What the hell are you two talking about?' asked Lesnick.

'He thinks we're pirates, brethren of the coast,' I said, taking out my pen.

'That's right,' laughed Rayburn, 'buccaneers of the Queen's company, eh?'

'Nuts!' said Lesnick, signing the book and handing it and the pen to me.

I waved my pen at Lesnick. 'Don't laugh, Joe, they were quite a mob. They terrorized the rich, fat merchantmen off Hong-kong, didn't they, Mike?'

'By God they did!' he replied. 'Go on: sign it. I can't blackmail you on just your signature.'

'O.K,' I said, pocketing my pen. 'I might as well use yours.'

When I returned the book and pen, Rayburn put them away and poured drinks. We chatted about local winds, which worried him, since he hoped to make a fast passage through the straits and on to Cape Palos, where he might find a beam wind to take him north to the Riviera.

As Lesnick advised him on local weather, I examined him. He was about thirty and stood five feet, eight inches, weighing a well-conditioned one hundred and sixty pounds. He had a handsome face and friendly grin and manner.

Finally, I interrupted: 'Come on, Joe, you must be sick of my cooking by now. Let's find a good restaurant.'

'How right you are!' he laughed, then, turning to Rayburn, said: 'Care to join us, Mike?'

It was developing perfectly, for I had feared I would have to invite Rayburn or trust him to tag along. Whether or not Lesnick had an ulterior motive, other than cadging free drinks and a meal, I did not know.

'Sure,' said Rayburn. 'I was going ashore to meet my two mates. We planned to eat at Chez Pierre. Will that do you two?'

'It's all the same to me,' I said. 'Joe?'

'It's a bit expensive. But I did want a steak, and they've the best.'

Outside the port gates, Lesnick insisted we have a drink with him in a bar across the street. After a quick one and a refill, he said he had to make a call to his girl-friend. The phone was on the wall at the far end of the bar, and he had waited until a group near it had finished their drinks and departed. Walking over, he took the dog-eared directory from a hook on the wall,

leafed through it, then dialled his number. He left the book open on the bar after he returned to us.

'Any luck?' I asked, forcing myself to grin and controlling the impulse to rush down the bar. If someone else wanted to phone or if a tidy waiter noticed . . .

'Sure,' he said, 'she's palpitating, and I'm throbbing. It looks like a good siesta.'

'You've reminded me,' I said. 'I want a siesta too, but I haven't even got a hotel reservation.'

I walked over and picked up the book. Before leafing through it to the hotel section, I quickly noted the capital letters at the top of the left-hand page: 'AUX-BAL'. The second hotel I phoned agreed to keep a bed and bath for me, and I returned to Lesnick and Rayburn.

'You got anyone to go with the bed?' asked Lesnick.

'For Christ's sake, I've only arrived . . . Say, how about that lunch, I'm starving?'

We finished drinks and took a taxi up the hill to Chez Pierre, where Rayburn introduced us to his fellow crew-members: John Cox and Ed Howe. Facially, they were different from him and each other, but their physiques and ages were nearly the same as Rayburn's. We ate well, and as we were finishing coffee and cognac, Lesnick said he had to leave, but agreed to meet me that night in the Bar Madison.

'O.K.' I said to Rayburn after Lesnick left us.

'Yes,' he replied, gesturing to his companions.

After being out of touch with an ally for six weeks, it was a great morale booster to be with three British agents. The restaurant, with its clatter of dishes and noisy French diners, was a good background for a conference. Cox added to the din by tuning a transistor radio to the moaning and percussion of flamenco music, a sure way to distort the reception of any electronic eavesdroppers.

'Are things hotting up?' I asked. 'Why three of you?'

'Nothing unusual. We're holding a watching brief and waiting for you. What was the number of that page? We can get on

with it, while you nip over to Gib. You are going, aren't you?'

'Yeah, I'll go over in a couple of days, when I can fix up a cover. I've got one, but it requires a cable to the U. K. I didn't get the number of the page, but the left-hand one's headed "AUX-BAL".'

'Good. We can see if any of the names are on the surveillance reports. I suppose there are a couple of hundred?'

I shrugged. 'I couldn't check it, with Lesnick looking on, but there are about two hundred entries on the pages with the hotel section. Was he watching me?'

'Briefly, but he lost interest. It was quite a blunder, if he was calling the boss.'

I grinned widely. 'It sure as Jesus was! I'll try to identify the girl-friend to see if it's worth checking those entries thoroughly.'

'Fine. You got anything else for us?'

'Yeah, I'm bloody sure the arms runner is a German called Strauss, who's definitely smuggling drugs out of Sicily. He's got an M. F. V., but I don't know the name. I'm through with that tub of mine, so you boys have the port. You should be able to find quite a few dock rats who hate his guts.'

Rayburn nodded. 'A pretty character. What's your hotel?'

'The Atlas. How do I get in touch?'

'Box 233 in the B. P. O. We've got your box number, and if it's urgent we've got a phone on the boat. It's 14967. It's supposed to be a yacht quay and they've got telephone lines laid on.'

I grimaced. 'Isn't that too obvious? Aren't you casual yachtsmen on a visit?'

'Not quite. We go out on day charters, so we have the phone for business. Well, if there's nothing else, you push off first.'

I got up, waved at them, then walked to the Atlas Hotel, repeating to myself the numbers, 233 and 14967.

After a siesta and bath, I phoned the real estate dealer whom I had contacted six weeks ago. He had shown me several houses, none of which interested me. Nor, for that matter, had any acquaintances recommended a suitable compromise. I wanted a

house with two or three bedrooms, surrounded by a large garden having at least two methods of access, one of them invisible from both the house and the main entrance. Moreover, the house must have a burglar-proof potentiality, when I was inside.

I am not a garden-lover; I simply wanted an area in which I could talk with Sandra Grant or other agents without being overheard by electronic devices. Although the house would be open to enemy agents, supposedly checking the metres or testing or repairing the electricity or telephone, they could not successfully bug a large garden, especially if I moved about it carrying a noisy radio. With two or more approaches, I might slip out unseen, should I be threatened at the front door. I could guarantee my security within the house, provided the ground floor windows were barred, as they usually were in Tangier. I was confident of handling any intruders through the upper windows or barring the doors to them. Naturally, I wanted no resident servants with palms waiting to be greased.

Since the dealer had nothing new, I phoned Jim Gordon and suggested I take advantage of his invitation. He agreed, for not only did he want to see me, but also to return the luggage I had left with him. Ten minutes later, he greeted me and called for coffee and cognac.

'Any hour is drinking time in this crackpot town,' he explained. 'How's the script coming?'

'Nothing but an exercise book full of notes,' I said. 'I'm way behind schedule, but I've got most of the plot in my head.'

Gordon was a moon-faced, broad-shouldered Scot of about thirty-five, whose aggressiveness was mitigated by a keen sense of humour. That he had succeeded in a rough racket during the past ten years was proof of his intelligence and ruthlessness. We chatted about script-writing and film-making, and I made no effort to give him the opening he sought.

Finally, he grinned. 'You win. All right, what do you intend doing about Strauss? That meat-head brother of mine let you in for something I hadn't bargained for. Some wide boys I con-

tacted in London vouched for you, but I don't know whether that extends to drugs.'

'As I told your brother,' I replied, 'I don't want to know. I promised you I would fake the contraband background and I will. There'll be no live characters, no real geographical locations, and no Mafia, under any circumstances. My smuggling characters will all suffer from arrested development, just big boys in a game with comic-opera Italians. No one in it ever heard of junkies or horse.'

'Horse?'

'Heroin – what I presume they're smuggling. Believe me: I'm neither going to write about it nor talk about it. I really don't want to know!'

'Fine, Robert. That's what I hoped. I've got to trust you, because I work with Strauss on cigarettes. In a couple of years, I should have enough to clear out, but until then I have to co-operate with him and the Mafia. So you'll nacker me if you talk.'

After more coffee, he said: 'You still want a house with a large garden?'

'Yes, you got one?'

'Perhaps, but it's five hundred dollars for just two months. Take it or leave it.'

'That's all right. When can I see it?'

'Any time. I have to phone the owner and drive you up there. He's a friend and a bit of a nut. Even if you don't take it, you should have a laugh.'

Assured by phone we were welcome, he drove me to the villa, off Tangier's Old Mountain Road. On the way, he told me the owner was an artist, who travelled often, renting the house occasionally in his absence, though he was particular about his tenants.

'He's lousy with *flus*,' said Gordon, 'but always pleads poverty. So he rents the house provided he and his bloody dogs like you. You like dogs?'

'Usually, as long as they belong to others. What's *flus*?'

'Arabic for money. It's about the only word I know after ten years here - that and go away. You have to take care of the dogs, since he doesn't trust his servants with them. If you don't take the place, I have to feed the damned brutes. The dogs, incidentally, are supposed to guard several valuable paintings, for the staff lives out.'

After a fifteen-minute drive, the latter part up a winding, narrow road, he parked in front of an eight-foot high wall, on top of which glass shards glittered. He rang a bell beside a stout iron door, whose frame was set into the concrete of the wall. A servant opened it and showed us into the house, where I was introduced to a smiling tense man of about sixty, whose name was Larry Smith.

'Hello, you old stiff,' he said to Gordon, then turned to me. 'And you're the young man this scoundrel has recommended. That's bad enough, but I hear you write film scripts.'

'Sorry,' I said, 'I drink too.'

'Nothing wrong with that!' he snorted. 'But let's get this over with quickly and have a few. If the dogs accept you, you're welcome. Come on.'

While Gordon remained in the house, Smith and I walked into the large garden, whereupon two male Dobermans bounded up, circling us and watching me closely. I had not foreseen this breed, but knew of their viciousness. Smith called them closer and told me to let them smell my hand, then to pet them.

Chuckling, he said: 'If they don't like you you may lose a few fingers.' The dogs apparently accepted me, and he added: 'Well, that's that. You're in. They won't bother you now unless you climb over the wall.'

The garden was surrounded by the high wall and was not overlooked by nearby houses or trees with thick foliage. Smith told me a sheer cliff dropped to the beach, two hundred feet below, on one side of the rectangular lot and most of another. The remaining section and the third side bordered two adjoining properties. Unfortunately, the property lacked a rear entrance, but, as Smith pointed out, I could identify callers

from an upstairs window before telling the servants to admit them.

'Come inside now, and I'll show you around,' he said.

The house was well furnished and equipped – even to a walk-in deep freeze – and had barred and screened windows on both floors. Alarm devices were installed on the windows, doors, and paintings. They did not impress me, for the power supply could be cut outside the house, but I felt it was possible to make the windows and doors more secure without leaving any trace.

Downstairs again, Smith poured drinks. 'Well,' he said, 'what about it? I don't suppose this nit-wit told you you'd have to pay for the staff's food and their wages. But it's not much. I have three men, and one of their main duties is to stay in at night until you return.'

'One thing,' I said, 'I have a secretary coming out here. How will the dogs react to her?'

'Oh, you're that way inclined,' he laughed. 'But I suppose there's nothing wrong with it. No, don't worry about it: for some obscure canine reason, the dogs like women – all women, unfortunately. It's a sad commentary on their tastes.'

'All right, I'll take it. When can I move in?'

'In three days,' he replied. 'I've got a reservation then for my car on the Gib ferry, so come up early in the morning.'

After two drinks, Gordon and I drove to the city.

Back in town, I sorted out my luggage in the hotel and sent a cable to Sandra Grant, telling her I would meet her plane in Gibraltar two mornings hence. I also made reservations in a Gibraltar hotel for the next two nights, with additional accommodation for Sandra for the latter night. Then I arranged tickets for us by air from Gibraltar, returning to Tangier on the early flight in three days time. I planned to go to Gibraltar by ferry tomorrow so that I could spot the steward who was the Russian courier and, perhaps, his Tangier accomplice.

Later, I went to the British consulate, ostensibly to register but actually to see Gomez, our man in the commercial section.

I entered a door so labelled and saw a slight, bespectacled man in his fifties behind a desk, talking in Spanish to a visitor. The walls of the room carried many shelves full of directories and guide books, and his task was apparently to advise prospective Tangier importers on where in Britain they might find items of interest to them. So I gathered while waiting for the conversation to finish.

After the Spaniard left, Gomez – or the man I presumed was he – turned to me, eyebrows raised.

‘I’m interested in importing pens like this,’ I said, showing him mine. ‘The make is the Queen Company.’

‘Ah yes,’ he smiled, producing a similar one, ‘like this Hong-kong product. How do you do, Mr Belcourt? How was the yacht trip?’

I scowled. ‘Bloody awful, mate. Give me a description of the courier’s accomplice in Tangier.’

‘Carlos Serrano. Unusually big moustache for a Spaniard, more RAF-type. Drives a scooter with a racoon-tail tied to the pillion, which he always removes whenever he parks the scooter. He’s about forty-five, five feet, five inches, and ten stone. Dark complexion, staring eyes, and a lot of black, wavy hair, combed straight back. Speaks bad English and reasonable French.’

‘The steward?’

‘Roberto Corrales, Gibraltarian. Scar on right cheek. Clean-shaven and almost bald with a grey fringe. He’s fifty, five feet eight inches, and thirteen stone. Big belly. Speaks bad English.’

‘Where do I find him on the ferry?’

‘He’s usually at the head of the gangway, taking passports. After you sail, you’ll see him in the dining saloon.’

Grinning, I said: ‘You’ve got a machine gun delivery.’

He smiled. ‘I have to. That door may open any time.’

‘Until it does, then . . . You in touch with Harvey?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m going over by boat tomorrow and have practically everything he wants. Ask him to tail me and phone when he’s sure

I'm clean. The arms smuggler is probably Strauss, a German contrabander, working out of here.'

He nodded. 'That doesn't surprise me. Anything else?'

'When we got back a few hours ago, Lesnick phoned someone, whose number is on the pages of the telephone directory, one of which is headed "AUX-BAL". I passed it on to Rayburn. I'm coming back in three days and will -' the door opened behind me '- you might find it if you have a good look through your shelves. I can't and I haven't the time for a thorough search, but I'll be back soon. You're sure you haven't a copy? It's the sort of directory I thought you'd have.'

'No, I don't think I have, but let me write it down,' said Gomez, as a strange man came up beside me. When he smiled at me, I nodded. Gomez continued: 'What was the name again?'

'Hunt's Theatrical and Literary Agents' Directory.'

I said good-bye and nodded again to the stranger. I would be able to identify him now, should I meet him under more dubious circumstances. The only news I had been unable to pass on was my future Tangier address. As for my request to Harvey for a shadower, I had to know whether or not I was under surveillance. My visit to the consulate had been innocent and normal, but I did not want anyone to puzzle over my association with Harvey, for both Strauss and Lesnick might have passed word that I merited investigation.

Returning to the hotel, I showered again and lay on the bed, examining at last the 'AUX-BAL' page of the directory. On it, I found two English names, and on the right-hand one about thirty-five banks. Then I remembered Gibraltar's colony of Sephardic Jews, many of whom had business interests in Tangier. I could identify some twenty Jewish names and knew the pages would list, as well, other Gibraltarians with Spanish names. Suddenly, I realized my error: the spy master's first language was English and second Spanish, while the contrary applied to Gibraltarians. Among the banks, I found three with English names, but I realized I had no leads until I saw the

surveillance reports. I tossed the directory on the bedside table and dozed off.

At nine o'clock, I walked to the Bar Madison, which had already warmed up for the evening. Presided over by Hal, a lanky American, the bar was famous among the world's travelling bar flies and social drinkers. Under its dim lights, Hal ran it more as a club, but was too astute not to fuss over the casual drinker or diner. Despite bad debts and rubber cheques, he still had a genial approach to most of his clients, whether they were important figures in entertainment or commerce, grubby beatniks, or rogues on the run.

When I sat at one end of the bar, he greeted me by name, poured my drink, and left, saying he had to attend to a table of diners. I had a good vantage point from which to watch the inevitable show.

Three fading women, all dedicated drinkers, sat next to each other at the other end of the bar. I had been introduced to one, a blousy, blonde American, on a previous trip and nodded to her. She smiled blankly, not remembering me but unwilling to freeze any male not obviously diseased.

A sharp-featured Englishwoman, next to her, said in a penetrating whisper: 'Who is he, darling?'

To which the blonde replied: 'An old friend from the Riviera.'

'Don't lie, Helen,' snapped the third, an American. 'You can't see him clearly without your glasses. He could be King Kong, for all you know.'

'How divine!' said the blonde. 'I'll toss you, even though I saw him first.'

'Well, he's not,' said the Englishwoman. 'He's a male human.'

'How do you tell in this town?' asked the other American.

'I'll give odds he's warm, can see lightning, and hear thunder. That's good enough here, with horrors like *that* swishing about.'

She had gestured at two American men in the centre of the bar. One had dyed blond hair and a freshly scrubbed pink face,

a complexion found usually on a pig. He was about fifty-five, and his companion a slim, elegant flower of twenty-five. I switched my attention to them and between their giggles overheard snatches of gossip about some of the swarm of Moroccan princes and princesses, with whom they claimed intimate friendship.

I noted the sweet smell of *kif*, the local marijuana, and decided it must come from a table, at which three wispily bearded young men were smoking and listening closely to a cadaverous man in his late forties. After some moments, I recalled the sage's identity: a junkie and avant garde writer of anti-novels. Hal frequently scowled at this group, for they were sipping soft drinks. This did not necessarily mean poverty, for junkies do not drink spirits. In any representative Tangier gathering of foreigners, one should find morphia or heroin addicts, since the drug laws were casually enforced.

A solitary drinker beside the precious pair at the bar stopped Hal. Although I had thought him sober, he was actually near a state of paralysis, for he mumbled: 'Hal, let's have another one . . . By the way, did I ever tell you I was with Billy Bishop in the first war?'

'Often. Here's your drink,' said Hal, after rapidly splashing gin into a glass.

'Well, Billy and I were flying over the Somme one day . . .' he started, but trailed off, when he realized Hal was talking to me. After gossiping briefly, I told Hal I had hired Larry Smith's house. He approved, but warned me watch out for my neighbours to the east, a pair of quarrelsome lesbians. He left to pour drinks, exposing himself to more reminiscences from the comrade of Billy Bishop.

Then Lesnick joined me. I let him order, since he had already cadged a meal and the drinks he had offered me in the bar near the port. During a slanderous description of the personal foibles of the other clients, he said virtuously that the blond homosexual preyed on elderly, wealthy women. To his amusement, he was overheard, and the pair flounced out.

Suddenly, Hal decided to share his burden, saying to the

comrade of Billy Bishop: 'You know, Mr Ross, you'll find quite a few of your fellow coun rymen about tonight.'

'Oh yes, where?'

'Over there - those two,' said Hal, pointing at Lesnick and me.

Ross stared at us, then said: 'You fellows probably heard of me. I was with Billy Bishop in the first . . .'

'Balls!' snorted Lesnick.

Ross started, then looking closely at Lesnick, said: 'You're not a Canadian; you're a phoney!'

He turned away from the bar and, clearly trying desperately to control his legs, walked to the door. He stumbled and fell into the arms of some guides, who usually lurked outside the bar.

Lesnick laughed. 'That'll teach him. They'll have his wallet in seconds.'

I had one more and left, telling Lesnick I was going to Gibraltar tomorrow to meet my secretary and shop. He toasted me, and I returned to my hotel room.

Chapter 8

Harvey tapped my report with a pencil and looked up at me. 'That's interesting: Lesnick knew Strauss was smuggling arms, but didn't know about the drugs. You're absolutely sure of that, are you?'

'That's the way it came out,' I replied. 'But you're jumping to conclusions. Lesnick asked me if Tocco and Miranda had mentioned some Yugoslav connection of Strauss's, while Tocco spoke of a Yugoslav-Strauss deal that was threatened by the French. The inference is obvious, but don't forget no one ever said anything about arms. Lesnick's surprise over Strauss's drug-running was genuine: he knows Strauss is up to something else.'

Harvey shrugged and continued reading, while I got up and crossed to the barred window of his office. It overlooked a small courtyard, whose details were blurred in the darkness. It was several hours since I had boarded the ferry in Tangier, identified the two couriers, Serrano and Corrales, and later, arrived in Gibraltar. After checking into my hotel, I had spent two hours walking about the colony and its junk-littered bazaars. When I felt that my shadow had determined whether or not others dogged my trail, I returned to my room to write the report. It had been a simple task, for I had already spent several weeks considering its presentation. Eventually, Harvey had phoned me that I was not under surveillance and named an hour for our meeting. Nevertheless, I had observed precautions in going to his office.

In the report, I had outlined my reasons for thinking Strauss was the potential or actual gun-runner, but urged further in-

vestigation. I had suggested his boat be shadowed and, perhaps, searched on its next call at Gibraltar. Even more promising would be the placing of an agent aboard or the bribing of a crew member, though I held out some hope for revelations from Cookie.

Apparently Harvey was reading that section, for he commented: 'Good idea, that – getting that windbag aboard as cook. But I don't think we've got much hope of learning anything from the other crew members. When I learned of your suspicions of Strauss, I checked the crew list they fill in for the police here. They're a tough lot. With the exception of Strauss and Cookie, they're all Arabs, two of whom have a history of working for Moroccan independence.'

'How about searching the boat?'

He nodded. 'It's in the works when he next comes in, but we can't do it unless we've half-a-dozen contrabanders or yachts about. Although we've got some good men, don't expect them to find amnio in the bilges.'

'When was he here last?'

'About three weeks ago, before returning to Tangier. His last port of call was Malta, and I'm checking there.'

My interest quickened. 'You'd better do a thorough job, because he should have been here four weeks ago, not three. Where did he spend the extra week after leaving us off Sicily?'

'In Malta. Why?'

'Hell, he'd a shipment of drugs. If he didn't transship them at sea, which I'm convinced he didn't, he unloaded them in either Malta or Gib. But why Malta, since it's close enough for a Mafia fishing boat?'

'Why wouldn't he pass them to a freighter at sea?'

'And alert the crews of his boat and the freighter? This drug business is strictly a one-man show. Strauss takes it directly from the Mafia and delivers it personally to someone.'

Harvey got up, paced his office, then stopped to stare at me. 'You're right. The bloody stuff must have been offloaded in Gib. Unfortunately, I'm more interested in arms, since it's my

cup of tea. Why didn't you put these suggestions in your report?'

'Some are; you haven't got there yet. But I didn't know about his stopping in Malta.'

Making notes as he read, he finished the report and, picking up a phone, asked for the names of New York-bound ships in Gibraltar during Strauss's last visit. As he received the information, he noted it down. When he hung up the receiver, he turned to me. 'Very interesting: an American Export liner was in Algeciras. I recall from the American police reports that some ships of the line have carried drugs for the Mafia.'

'How do you get the drugs from Gib to a boat off Algeciras?'

He snorted. 'Nothing to it! The Independence and the Constitution are at anchor off Algeciras, but a tender goes out twice from Gib: first, to bring the passengers here for shopping; and, secondly to return them with their loot.'

'Aren't you getting away from the facts?'

He grinned. 'So I am, but it's a bloody good lead. Strauss takes the drugs from Palermo and stops at Malta until he can time his arrival here to coincide with that of the liner. He was here for only twelve hours, arriving the night before the liner and sailing before her. During that time, no other New York-bound ship was here, so the drugs came ashore at night and went out the following day on the tender. Hell, they never left the port. Many thanks.'

I shook my head. 'Don't thank me, chum. You built that one, not me.'

'Well, it's just what I needed to get the Yanks off my neck . . .' he started, then trailed off, when he caught me grinning.

'What's this,' I asked, 'another example of Anglo-American cooperation?'

He studied me. 'Now, don't you jump to conclusions! Drugs are not my line, but the Americans don't think much of our local police. So they've been bugging me, as I believe they would say. But your leads are concrete, and my hypothesis fits the facts

– indeed, it may be the only one. Now the ball is back in their court: right aboard one of their own bloody liners!’

‘Why not wrap it up for them? There must be several thousand people aboard those ships, each of whom goes ashore in New York.’

He nodded wearily. ‘I will, if I can. But you’ve narrowed it down, thank God! Now, let’s get back to the arms business. Why are you so curious about how Tocco knew of Strauss’s connection with the Yugoslavs?’

‘Why the hell would a Mafia don know anything about international intrigue?’

‘Well, you’ve suggested he had a spy aboard.’

I shook my head. ‘That was before you told me about the Arab crew. Then there’s another thing: what happened to the cook who’s supposed to have deserted in Sicily? I hadn’t thought of developing that angle until now. Have you got him on an old crew list?’

He looked through a file, found a paper, then said: ‘The previous time, Strauss carried a French cook with a Corsican name.’

I nodded. ‘Don’t forget the connection between the Mafia and the Corsicans. If he was a Mafia spy, maybe Strauss got wise to him and dumped him over the side. It wouldn’t bother the Arab crew. Or maybe the guy was so scared at running guns, he really did desert. The Arabs would think it idealistic, but even a crooked Frenchman might chicken out.’

He poured us drinks, then said: ‘We’d better try to find out what happened to him. Anything else?’

‘No.’

‘When does Grant’s niece arrive?’

His way of identifying her was not lost on me, and I replied: ‘The morning plane.’

‘Well, I’ll have you both tailed, and when I get a report, I’ll contact you on how we’ll meet. I don’t want to go through it twice, so I’ll postpone briefing you until she’s here.’

‘Can you lend me a fishing rod and reel?’

He looked puzzled. 'I guess so. Why?'

'If we're clean, phone me that you've got the fishing gear. But really get it, for I've rented a dinghy for Sandra and me and intend to use it.'

Grinning, he said: 'So it's Sandra, eh? Well, make sure that's all you use.'

Before I could think of a retort, one of his telephones rang. He picked it up, listened, then his face became alert. Motioning that he wanted me to stay, he spoke into the phone: 'Sure, right away. Where?'

He nodded as he listened, then said: 'Right. In ten minutes. I'll have someone with me.'

He hung up, smiling. 'Strauss's boat just came in. They're being delayed by the port police until we get there. Do you have to break any engagement?'

'No.'

'Come on, then.'

On the way to the courtyard, I said: 'Is this wise: our appearing together?'

'It's all right. You'll only be seen by my contact in the Special Branch. I want you to point out Cookie, if he comes ashore. We'll arrange something to separate him from the rest of the crew, and you can talk to him. O.K?'

I shrugged. 'Sure.'

In the courtyard, he waved me into the back of a small van and signalled to a man standing at the door to the street. The doors swung back, and Harvey drove us through. No one could see me unless they shone a light through the windshield, for neither the sides nor the rear doors had proper windows. A few minutes later, Harvey turned into a fenced area and parked.

'Stay there until I make sure no one's about,' he whispered, getting out.

He circled the van, then opened the rear door and motioned me out. We were in the port, near the main entrance, where the police and customs check those entering or leaving. Harvey led me to a door behind a small building that I recalled was the port

customs office. He produced a key, opened the door, and led me in. After locking it, he walked to a flight of stairs and started up. He knew his way, for the lights were out.

Upstairs, a man was sitting on a desk, looking out of a window at the port entrance. He turned as we entered, saying: 'Right on time, Phil. What do you want to do? The police are still aboard.'

'Let them come ashore, Reg,' replied Harvey. 'How many men have you got?'

'Six.'

'How are you in touch?'

'Radio – with a man in the police post. What do you want?'

'One man tailed and separated from the rest. We'll identify him, if he comes out. But get on with it; we don't want to keep them sweating aboard.'

Reg passed instructions over a set that resembled a transistor radio, then turned to us, saying: 'It should be at least thirty minutes before we get any action.'

Harvey turned away from the window to say: 'Why is Strauss back here?'

'Got another load of cigarettes. He told the police boat officers he was off for Malta – the usual dodge for the manifest. On your standing orders, I had him delayed until we could organize whatever you wanted.'

'Thanks. What excuse are the police using to keep them aboard?'

Reg chuckled. 'Practically all Arabs are called Mohammed. So they're looking for a Mohammed wanted for robbery here during Strauss's last call. Until you gave the word, the police were sorting out identities.'

'Fine. That should ease their minds.'

Reg got up, pulled a chair towards the window and sat on it. 'By the way, Phil, do you still want the boat searched?'

'Yes. But how many others are in?'

'Don't worry. We've got three other contrabanders and two yachts. Any public reason for the search?'

'No, to hell with the scruffy bastards. But start a rumour we're looking for gold bullion.'

'When do you want it done?'

'Tomorrow morning' I'll do. We don't want to excite them.'

'Right,' said Reg, then, gesturing at me, added: 'Say, who's your silent friend? Don't I get a formal introduction?'

'You know better than that.'

Reg snorted. 'You cloak and daggers give me a big pain. Anyway, mystery man, hello. I'm Reg.'

Since my accent might pique his curiosity, I said nothing, but shook his hand.

He laughed. 'All right, I get it. The real silent service, eh?'

'You're bloody right we're the silent service,' chuckled Harvey. 'When you birds get a skinful of gin, you're like gossip old women.'

'Speaking of gin, have a drink. It's scotch, and we've still a few minutes.'

As Harvey took the bottle he said: 'Where did you get this? Isn't it a little out of character to come prepared?'

'No, I found it here opened. The customs probably confiscated it. So after they helped themselves, I did.'

We sat looking out of the window. The blaze of lights at the port entrance was reflected off the ceiling, dimly illuminating the room. It was typical of government offices: uncomfortable chairs, plain desks, and a filing cabinet. A pile of parcels stood in a corner near the window. Bored, I prowled about the office, stopping to look incuriously at the common objects in the room. When I stood before the parcels, I touched one. Something clicked in my mind, and I ran my hands over its surface. Then I felt several others: they were all similar. I picked one up and carried it away from the window. Kneeling on the floor, I examined it under the flickering light of a match.

Wrapped in brown paper and tied with white cord, it was about two feet long, one foot wide, and six inches thick. It seemed to contain cylinders.

I returned to Harvey and tugged his elbow until he got up and followed me.

'What is it?' he asked, as I lit another match.

'That's how the drugs go aboard the liners.'

'What!' he barked.

'Yeah, that's the same parcel I saw in Miranda's house.'

'Christ almighty! The ingenious bastards!'

'What are they?' I asked. 'There's a pile of them over there, and they're all the same. Do you recognize them?'

He exploded: 'You're damned right I do. What a break!'

'Fill me in; you've left me.'

He patted me on the back, then producing a torch, pointed the beam at the parcel. 'Take a good look. I want you to be absolutely sure.'

'Yes, that's it. Or, at least, it's a replica. Are the rest the same?'

'They sure as hell are, mate! You've struck pure gold.'

'Well, they can't all contain Mafia drugs. What's in them?'

'Booze. Any foreigner leaving Gib is allowed to take out six duty-free bottles of spirits. There's one helluva trade in it, especially with Americans returning home. They don't pay customs in the States, and the cost is a fraction of the retail price over there.'

'Why are they here?'

I could see his wide grin despite the bad light. 'The customs keep them here until the purchaser leaves Gib. He picks them up on his way out. If it's by liner, the whole lot go out by tender and are claimed aboard.'

I whistled. 'The tender again! You've tied it up, chum.'

He punched me playfully on the chest, a gesture quite alien to him normally. 'Yes, the tender. You remember my hypothesis? Not so bad now, is it?'

'Don't crow too much. I think I might have contributed something.'

He laughed. 'That you have, Robert! Don't worry about my crowing; I'm just bloody pleased. Thanks a helluva lot!'

We returned to the window, where Reg was looking at us curiously. 'You two look as though you've just put a dagger through someone's cloak.'

'Not quite,' replied Harvey. 'But let's have that bottle. We've really got something to celebrate.'

Several minutes passed, when suddenly Reg's set crackled. He held it to his ear, then said to us: 'Four of them are coming ashore. They should be at the gate soon.'

After several minutes, the quartet came into sight. When they stopped under the lights to show their papers to the police, I nudged Harvey, saying: 'He's the one wearing a jacket and tie. Strauss isn't with them.'

Harvey relayed my identification to Reg, who spoke into his set. Finished, he turned to us, asking: 'Now what?'

'I've got the van,' said Harvey. 'You can keep in touch from it.'

In the parking lot, Reg and I climbed into the back, and Harvey drove us off. After a few minutes, he parked near a football field. Whenever the set crackled, Reg kept us posted on the movements of our quarries.

Fifteen minutes later, he said: 'You're in luck. The three Arabs have gone into a cinema, and your man is walking south on Main Street. When they stopped in a bar, he had two double whiskies, and the Arabs had beer.'

Harvey said to me: 'I'll drop you in Mackintosh Square. Walk north towards Cookie and take him into a bar. Reg, have two of your men watch the cinema and the other four stay with our man.'

Several minutes later, he dropped me in the square and parked nearby. The timing was perfect, for I met Cookie within thirty yards. I fixed my face in a wide grin and shouted: 'Well, Cookie, I'll be damned! How's your old straw hat, shipmate?'

He had trouble focusing, then pounded me on the back, exclaiming: 'It ain't been felt, yet, chum! Bet you didn't expect that reply?'

He laughed uproariously and added: 'Come for a drink, Robert. Let's celebrate.'

'I don't know, Cookie, I've got to . . .' I started, but he broke in:

'None of that, Robert. Come on.'

He pulled me into the first bar and ordered two double scotches and beer chasers. He was flushed and obviously had drunk more than the two drinks his shadowers credited him with. Probably he had been at the wine aboard; I had always suspected him of being semi-drunk at sea. He rambled on about what a fine crew he was now with and that I was the only 'good guy' when we had been together. Within thirty minutes he had ordered two more doubles, most of which I poured on the floor, though he drank each of his in two gulps.

He winked. 'That was the best favour anyone ever did for me, Robert.'

'What's that?'

'Helping me get off that bloody boat. That was damned good of you, volunteering to do the cooking. I know you didn't want to, but it meant more lolly for both of us. Anyway, thanks.'

'Glad to hear it. Do you make much more? I know the Gordons are stingy, but is Strauss much better?'

He snorted. 'You're bloody right he is. We make money coming and going. Yes, sir, that's the way to do it.'

I studied him. 'What do you mean: coming and going?'

'That's how it goes. Cigarettes one way for the wops, and toys the other for those who know how to use them.'

Pausing, he laughed loudly. 'Yes, mate, they're real toys for real men. We get double pay for it – and in a good cause too.'

It was all wrapped up. Grinning, I tossed my scotch off. 'I don't know what you're talking about, but I'm glad you're happy and in the chips.'

He winked. 'Yes, mate, real toys for real men.'

I ordered more drinks and when they arrived, wondered how I could leave without drinking mine. Suddenly, it was settled for me: Strauss walked in.

Chapter 9

His face livid, Strauss came up behind Cookie and grabbed him by a shoulder.

'Take your . . .' roared Cookie, then when he turned faltered: 'Oh . . . Hi, Skip! Join us for a drink?'

'What the hell are you doing here?' barked Strauss. 'You told me you were going to a film.'

'So I wanted a drink first. What's wrong with that?'

'You don't have to drink with this scum!'

'Aw, Skip, he's a friend of . . .'

I never heard the end of the protest, because I leapt up and threw my neat scotch into Strauss's face, blinding him. He bel-lowed his hands going to his eyes. I swept up my light wire chair in one hand and swatted him across the head with it. I hit him again with it, but he was ready and wrested it from me. He threw it wildly, missing me. A woman screamed, and I glimpsed a barman reaching for a telephone.

Strauss was hurt, but still on his feet, angrily swearing in German. I stepped closer and drove a looping right into his stomach. He grunted and staggered. His groping hands found the table, and he swung it in my direction. I pulled it from him and almost had him on top of me, yelling triumphantly.

I stepped to one side, and he blundered into the table, falling across it to the floor. I had one more chance before the law arrived, for his stomach was an inviting target. I kicked him hard. His wind whistled out, and he retched. As I ran to the door, some waiters tried to block me, but I plunged through them and was on the street, running for the square.

I sped round the corner and slowed. Harvey's van was still

there. I jumped in, and he drove off, turning at the first intersection and again at the second.

'How are you?' asked Reg. 'We were getting a *blow-by-blow*, but nobody bothered to give your condition.'

'Fine, but you should see the other guy,' I grunted, as I got my wind back.

'We heard,' said Harvey. 'Look, Reg, you take the van and keep on those guys until they get back aboard. Let me know any developments.'

Reg drove away after Harvey and I got out near his office. When we were in the room, he poured drinks, as I drew on a cigarette.

'Well?' he said eventually.

'You can really wrap it up now, Phil. Strauss is already smuggling arms. He does it on his return trip from Sicily. Cookie told me: cigarettes one way "and real toys for real men" the other. He added that it was "in a good cause". What else could it be?'

'Great work, Robert. So, all we have to do is catch the bloody bastard in the act. By Christ, it's a great night's work!'

We agreed that Strauss's operation in drugs and arms were closely associated, though neither of his two principals might know or approve. Presumably, the Mafia were aware and disapproved. The time was set by the arrival in Algieras of the American Export liners bound for New York. After unloading cigarettes off Sicily, Strauss would leave with a shipment of Mafia drugs and call at Malta, where a communist or Egyptian agent would tell him whether or not he would unload arms as well on the return voyage. His problem was to reach Gibraltar the night before the liner's arrival so that the false package of spirits would be aboard the tender when it went out in the morning. If he were also running arms, he would allow several extra hours for the rendezvous with the freighter carrying them and for the trip to the Algerian coast, probably near Tunisia.

Strauss was no longer a problem to Harvey or me, for Grant would have to decide whether he would be arrested on his next

arrival in Malta or permitted to blaze a more incriminating trail back to Gibraltar. In the latter event, the Gibraltar police would try to determine where the drugs were hidden in the harbour, while the Royal Navy might shadow Strauss from Malta to his rendezvous with the freighter. How the drugs left the liner in New York was a matter for American narcotics agents. Meanwhile, routine investigation by police and security agents in Malta would aid the Royal Navy.

I topped up my drink and said: 'Look, Phil, one more thing as a favour to me.'

He waved his hands expansively. 'Of course, anything. You've done a wonderful job. What is it?'

'Get that poor slob, Cookie, off the boat. Frame him for something that'll keep him ashore until they sail. He's round the bend.'

His expression changed, and he replied irritably: 'Why the hell bother? He's an adult and he's in a dirty game. He deserves everything he gets.'

'You won't do it, eh?' I sighed.

I saw uncertainty in his eyes and pressed again. 'What difference does it make to you? He's not like Strauss or those Arabs. He's nuts.'

'Well, I'll see what I can do, but Grant doesn't like us messing about with the police unless it's important.'

'This is important to me.'

His face was expressionless. 'I'll do what I can.'

'Well, if that means sweet F. A., you can count on my having a word with you, should Cookie get killed or jailed.'

He stared at me. 'Grant told me about you. Why don't you grow up? Sure, he's a slob, but he's in a dirty game. Help him now, and he'll probably cause more trouble the next time. He deserves . . .'

'Save it,' I interrupted. 'I asked it as a favour; I don't need a lecture . . . Anyway, phone me tomorrow when you've decided that Sandra Grant and I are clean.'

I walked out and returned to my hotel.

Sandra was gorgeous when I met her at the airport next morning. I greeted her warmly but impersonally and was so astonished when she kissed me on a cheek she was able to step back before I could grab her.

'Remember: neutrality,' she laughed. 'Don't build too much out of a peck. I'm practically a continental, and it's second nature to me.'

'Me too, but I kiss both cheeks. How about it, doll? That's aligned neutrality.'

'Not with you, it isn't. Now what?'

'Well, for a start . . .'

She tried to be stern. 'Cut it out.'

'O.K . . . Now, it's back to the hotel, where we'll spend the night. We'll fly to Tangier tomorrow morning. I've hired a sailing dinghy for the day, and, if you want to, we can go out for a picnic and swimming. Tonight, we can have a ball over in Spain. I know some places.'

She flashed a brilliant smile. 'I'll bet you do, but it sounds wonderful.'

When she had checked into the hotel and been shown her room, I phoned and suggested she accompany me on a shopping tour. I explained I wanted to buy some tinned food to take back to Tangier. She joined me in the lobby, and we set out, spending two hours in the bazaars. We were separated once for half-an-hour, while she bought a dress. Later, we returned to the hotel for coffee.

I was immediately called to one of the phones.

'Mr Belcourt? I've got the fishing equipment you wanted. You can call for it any time.'

'Fine, thanks,' I replied and hung up.

I told Sandra we were ready to go out in the dinghy and suggested she wear suitable clothes and bring a bathing suit, preferably a bikini.

Clearly, she expected to see Harvey, for she stared at me, saying slowly: 'Are you sure you've everything we need?'

'No, one more stop before the yacht club.'

She was relieved and smiled. 'All right, I'll meet you here in a few minutes.'

In my room, I stripped and put on bathing trunks and then slacks and a shirt. Downstairs, I picked up a picnic lunch the hotel had packed for me. Sandra joined me, carrying an airline bag and dressed in slacks and a blouse that clung to her full breasts. We took a taxi downtown and, after leaving it, rapidly entered and left three shops, each having two or more entrances. Within minutes, we ducked into Harvey's courtyard and walked up to his office.

Although I wanted to dislike him for hedging on my request about Cookie, I nearly laughed when he saw Sandra. Collecting himself, he greeted her, then turned to me.

'Robert, I had it in the works this morning to delay Cookie, but they sailed before I could do anything.'

He was pleading. 'Look, I couldn't do anything unless he came ashore. I'm damned sorry.'

I smiled. 'O.K., Phil. Thanks for the try. How was Strauss? I'm surprised he wasn't banged up enough to delay his departure.'

He shook his head. 'Not that one. He's tough. A few stitches last night, and he was on his way. But don't go near that bar in case someone recognizes you. Reg's men gave the police a wildly unreliable description of you. So if they do pick you up, we'll have you out as soon as our witnesses discredit the identification.'

Sandra was looking at me curiously. 'What's Robert been up to?'

'A small spot of mayhem, darling,' I said airily.

She frowned at the endearment, but I was rewarded by a glare from Harvey. Then he recalled us to business.

'Miss Grant, I believe you've got something for me from your uncle.'

She had found the thick envelope in her bag, and Harvey opened it, leafed through it, then threw it into a tray.

'Before I start this briefing,' he said, 'have you got anything from your uncle that affects your assignment?'

'No, except that he's very pleased with Robert. He told me to pass it on, saying it was great work.'

She smiled at me as she said this, and Harvey came in with: 'It certainly was. Well, let me sketch this job for you.'

The spy master, he said, was the GRU resident, or Russian army intelligence chief, of an area comprising Morocco, Algeria, Gibraltar, south Spain, and Portugal. From Tangier, he controlled a network aimed at infiltrating the recently independent Moroccan government and the Algerian rebel command and also designed to gather military intelligence from the area, including the American bases in Spain and Morocco. This was not conjecture, he stressed, for the British, French, and Americans had definite leads indentifying Tangier as the centre of the network and had received tips as well from the Portuguese and Spanish.

The British I. S. were convinced no one had definite clues to the identity of the resident and felt they were slightly in the lead, since they had infiltrated the network. As minor as it was, the penetration by their double agent in Gibraltar had yielded a definite pointer that the spy master's first language was English. It had also revealed a trail back to Tangier and another into Spain, though the latter had no bearing on our assignment.

The resident worked through cut-outs, who shielded him from his active agents. The double agent, one of whose duties was operating a Gibraltar letter-drop, knew only his courier-cut-out on the Tangier ferry and another agent, who was linked with Spain and the American naval base near Cadiz. The courier on the ferry dealt with another cut-out, Carlos (or Charlie) Serrano, who was probably associated directly with the resident.

From the time the British I. S. had become aware of the network, Harvey said, two years had elapsed before they uncovered Serrano three months ago. Since then, he had been under almost constant surveillance by changing teams of shadows, who were sure he was unaware of their attentions. A certain pattern had

been observed, and it was now necessary to develop the frail clues more directly.

'Serrano is a clever veteran who's been in the racket for years,' said Harvey. 'Even though he may not suspect he's being tailed, he confuses us with the number of places he visits daily. After three months, all we can give you are five business premises, three bars, and two flats.'

'How about the Spanish Consulate?' I asked. 'He goes there daily, I believe, to arrange Spanish visas for Gibraltarians.'

Harvey grinned. 'That we cannot investigate. But why should we, since the resident uses Spanish as a second language?'

'Then,' I said, 'Those ten addresses are of Englishmen or Americans?'

Harvey shook his head. 'Unfortunately not. Those ten are the ones Serrano visits most frequently. Any one of them, of course, might be a letter-drop. But as a starting point, concentrate on these four: three business addresses and one flat, run or lived in by British subjects or Americans. Here are the two lists.'

Glancing at the shorter one, I saw that only one of the four addresses, the Bank of Wall Street Foreign, would be on the pages of the Tangier telephone directory that interested me.

'What's with this Bank of Wall Street Foreign?' I asked.

'You're thinking of Lesnick's phone call?'

'Yes.'

'All right, we'll start there.'

To establish a bank under the regulations still in force from the International Administration, Harvey explained, it was necessary only to have the equivalent of two hundred dollars for an initial tax. After that, the bank could operate without outside supervision. The Bank of Wall Street Foreign had been organized in 1946 by a clever and crooked Swede, who had been involved in black market foreign exchange since the start of the war in 1939. A year ago, he left Tangier, turning the business over to a Canadian, Stan Johnson.

At the mention of his nationality, I started, saying: 'Is this why Grant wanted me on the job? Is he your prime suspect?'

Harvey shrugged, then, looking at Sandra, replied: 'Not necessarily. We don't know, because there is nothing more than the frequency of Serrano's visits to the bank.'

'Have you checked him back from Tangier?' asked Sandra.

'Of course, but neither we, the F. B. I., nor the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have any record of him.'

I sat forward in my chair. 'Hell, you must have something.'

Harvey smiled. 'Well, he wasn't born the day he arrived in Tangier in 1952. He's Canadian-born, served in the Canadian army during the war, and worked as a salesman for an American manufacturer of foodstuffs in Canada, Britain, and Europe from 1946 until he went to Tangier.'

'Why'd he leave the manufacturer?' I asked.

'An argument over pay and commissions, according to both him and the company. He also decided to establish a liquor business in Tangier and sell booze on the U. S. bases. He ran it as his main business until last year, when he took over the bank.'

I was puzzled and must have shown it, for Harvey said: 'How do you take over a bank, Robert? Well, no one knows. One day the Swede was running things, and the next Johnson was in charge. One theory is that the Swede felt he had the cream and wanted someone to take over, perhaps as a fall guy, while he retired to Switzerland.'

'Does this bank make money?' Sandra asked.

'Well, money goes in, but damned little ever comes out except in the owners' pockets.'

'Where do you find these depositors?' I asked.

'No trouble at all, apparently. The name is a come-on for Americans, because they think it has some status in the States. Hundreds of servicemen have their savings there, while other Americans, crooked and not so crooked, also have accounts. The bank offers five and half per cent interest, which is a fantastic lure. Further, a depositor pays no American or other income

tax on the interest, nor does he have nosey investigators asking why he has funds there.

'The bank keeps them sweet by employing an ex-journalist to write glowing reports and a fancy type-setter to print them. These tell the depositors how their investments are growing and suggest dubious companies, offering an even quicker return. Apparently, everyone is happy about his paper profits, but God help them if they all suddenly wanted their money. So far, there hasn't been a run. But that's enough on the bank: Johnson may be our boy, but we still have nothing concrete.'

Harvey asked Sandra if she wanted a sherry, which she accepted though I demanded scotch. After pouring the drinks, he continued: 'The other two businesses on that list are Mount Royal, S. A., Johnson's liquor store, and Rogers, S. A., a luxury food and liquor store, run by an Englishman, Charles Rogers.'

Sandra tapped the side of her glass. 'Johnson again. What have you got on Rogers?'

'A frightfully respectable scoundrel,' chuckled Harvey. 'He used to be a barrow boy in London, who was fencing as a sideline. After cheating some of his customers, he fled to Tangier in 1934. He polished his accent and went to work in 1936 for a fairly respectable firm of importers. During the war, he became manager and also worked for us as our main paymaster there. Did you meet him?'

'Never even heard of him,' I replied.

'He prospered during the war,' Harvey continued, 'for some of the money stuck that we turned over to him. After the war, he acquired several profitable agencies and retired to open the shop as an outlet for them. Another good racket he ran was short-changing everyone in sending food parcels to the starving British during post-war rationing.'

He offered cigarettes, which I declined, and lit Sandra's. He went on: 'The fourth address is the flat of an American writer, importer, and promoter, John Welch. He writes mysteries, represents several newspapers, and invests in various businesses,

among them the contraband racket. During the last war, he was in the army, possibly with American intelligence. But, if he's a communist, the Americans have no suspicion – or, at least, deny it. His connection with Serrano is that he uses the Spaniard as a news tipster and as a salesman for the various items he imports, such as cameras, watches, and radios.

'And that's it. The second list you can talk over with Gomez, but we don't think you'll get much from it. What you've got are three men, all dubious in varying degrees and all connected with Serrano. One of them definitely has an intelligence background, and another may have, though there is nothing to connect any of them with communism.'

Composing my face, I asked: 'What about their sexual habits?'

He looked directly at me and replied: 'Normal. They all chase women, even the two who are married, Johnson and Rogers.'

Sandra's face too was blank as she asked: 'What's Serrano's connection with the bank, liquor store and Rogers' store?'

'He changes money at the bank,' said Harvey, 'and buys booze and food at the two stores for shipment back to Gib.'

'What about employees of the bank and stores?' I asked. 'Any Englishmen or Americans?'

'The bank's full of them, but there isn't a brain in the lot. We sifted them carefully and found nothing. The staff changes constantly because of poor wages and their own instability. The resident has been working for at least two years, and no one in the bank has been there that long. This applies, as well, to an Englishman working in the liquor store, while the staff of Rogers' are all Spanish.'

On the surface, it was a simpler prospect than I had anticipated. 'So we've got three men, one of whom is the spy master?'

Shaking his head, Harvey smiled. 'That's not what you've got. We only think one of them may be.'

'Who do you think is the likeliest?' asked Sandra.

Harvey looked in turn at each of us. 'I'm not going to tell you, because Grant insisted that you have no preconceived notions.'

It was the old run-around, and I said wearily: 'Then you've got more than you're giving us?'

'No, I'm giving you all the clues we have. What I'm keeping back is pure conjecture.'

I smiled. 'You're lying in your teeth, but I didn't expect anything else.'

Smothering his anger, Harvey said: 'You must also look for a place where the resident keeps his records and which is guarded permanently. He runs a big operation and can't do it all from his head. Find the records, and we're in business.'

'What about Lesnick?' I asked.

Harvey was visibly relieved to be on firmer ground. 'Nothing more than you know already except that he left Gordon's boat yesterday and is staying ashore. Be careful of him: we think he's dangerous.'

'Now, there are a couple of incidentals: two con-men over there are trying separately to peddle arms to the Algerians, but it's got nothing to do with the resident. One is Charles Rosen, an Englishman, and the other Jim Wilmot, an Australian, both with long police records. If you run across them, anything will help. We think, however, they're just trying to get cash out of the Arabs and not deliver arms. We approve of that.'

'If you want electronic gear and operators, get in touch with Gomez. You can also have that trio on the yacht for any jobs, but try to keep them for important assignments. And that should wind it up. Any questions?'

Sandra watched me shake my head, then turned to Harvey. 'Who is Lesnick?'

Harvey's face was expressionless, but I sensed wariness. 'What do you mean?' he replied.

'Is he a Canadian,' she asked, 'whose first name is Joe?'

'It sure as hell is!' I snapped. 'How do you know him?'

'Well, if it's the same one, he used to work for us in London until he was fired for fiddling his accounts.'

Chapter 10

'Dig yourself out of that one, chum,' I laughed.

Harvey nodded wearily. 'It's the same man. How did you know him, Miss Grant?'

'I was working on the Egyptian desk two years ago, and Lesnick was dealing with some people we were interested in.'

'Did you ever meet him?'

'Never.'

'You're positive?'

'You know the type of work. We would never meet an agent.'

'How did you hear his name?'

'I knew him originally as a number, but his name came up regularly in the reports of another agent who was working on the same assignment. The second man didn't know Lesnick was a British agent, though Lesnick knew the other was. When I asked my boss why Lesnick was mentioned in only one series of reports, he told me who Lesnick was. Later, I heard he'd been fired. But I never met him.'

Harvey sighed. 'Thank God for that. Otherwise, we'd have to send you back to London.'

I shook a finger at him. 'You're not home yet. Let's hear some more about this supposedly sacked British agent. Make it plausible or – better still – tell the truth.'

He glared at me. 'We told you the truth, Robert. We think he's a dangerous communist agent. That's all there is.'

'It won't do. Why didn't you tell me he had been a British agent?'

He tried to look sheepish. 'Why should we? We're not proud

of him. He robbed us blind, then when he was fired went to work for the Russians, or so we think.'

'What do you mean "robbed us blind"? Why not say he nicked a few quid and padded his expenses? I know how mean you bastards are.'

'No, it was far more than that – several hundred pounds, at least.'

'So that's all you're going to tell us?'

'That's all there is. Anything else?'

When Sandra shook her head, I snorted: 'O.K, I know you're lying, but we'll push on when you've given me the fishing equipment.'

He left the office and returned with a rod and attached reel. 'Here you are,' he smiled, handing it to me. 'Good luck.'

'Balls!' I snapped. 'Why not be a real cornball and say: "Good fishing, chaps".'

He said nothing as he opened the door and ushered us out. Sandra shook his hand, but I ignored him.

We took a taxi to the fish market, where I bought a type of mollusc used as bait in those waters. Then we went to the yacht club and walked out on to its quay. The club boatman greeted me and pointed to a dinghy with a blue hull, which he said he had chosen for us.

'If it's all the same to you,' I said, 'I'd prefer that red one. Red's my lucky colour.'

The boatman nodded amiably, as though he heard this sort of balderdash regularly, and after sculling out, towed back my choice. I watched him carefully, but he hardly touched the dinghy, his contact being primarily with its painter. From the quay, he held the painter taut, while I steadied the stern. Sandra got in and took our gear from me.

The boatman said: 'You're sure sir, you know how to handle it?'

'How do you think I got these?' I replied, showing my callused hands.

'Right, Captain,' he grinned. 'Have a good voyage.'

I joined Sandra and hauled up the sail and made the sheet fast. The breeze was light, but the sail slatted until I went aft to take the tiller. I pulled up the helm until the sail drew, then sailed away, adjusting the sheet.

'Pour me a gin, darling,' I said. 'You'll find cold tonic in that insulated box and gin and glasses in the basket.'

'Now, let's get straightened out, Robert,' she said. 'My name is Sandra. It may amuse you to test Harvey's reactions, but it doesn't cut any ice with me.'

'O.K., Miss Grant.'

'That's unnecessary,' she smiled, pouring two drinks and handing me one.

When we were about 400 yards from shore, I said: 'You're slimmer than I am. Crawl about below and have a look.'

She disappeared and several minutes later emerged, saying: 'It looks all right to me.'

'Thanks. I didn't really expect anything, but . . .'

'Is that why you switched dinghies?'

'Yes.'

'How cautious can you get? You didn't really think someone would bug the dinghy, did you?'

'No, but why take the chance? Now, what do you think of our prospects?'

She looked at me. 'What do you mean?'

'The whole assignment stinks.'

'Why?'

'For a start, Lesnick's position is dubious. Why didn't your uncle tell me of his background with the firm? If he's a top level Russian agent, how did he get there in a couple of years? Provided I've interpreted correctly the information your uncle gave me, I think Lesnick is being groomed for a dangerous Russian assignment.'

'What is it? Stuart told me nothing.'

I grinned. 'That, beautiful, may be an advantage I have over

your uncle. Until he gives with a little more gen, I'm keeping it to myself.'

She frowned. 'You know, Robert, I have to pass this on.'

'That's why I told you. It's the thin edge.'

'But suppose you . . .'

'Snuff it,' I finished off. 'Don't worry: it's all written out in London for delivery to your uncle.'

She laughed. 'He told me you were one of the most difficult agents he had ever dealt with, but skipped the melodrama bit. By the way, what else stinks?'

'Too damned many Canadians.'

It was safer ground, and she took the lead. 'You think Johnson is the resident?'

'Of course. We'll concentrate on him until we know how many fillings he has in his teeth.'

'Any hunches?'

I grinned. 'Damned right I have. I think there's a connection between him and me.'

'Why?'

'The firm wanted me desperately on this job. Presumably, they think I can get close to Johnson, or so I believe. They've plenty of regulars who could handle this assignment. Why pick me?'

'First, you know Tangier; and, secondly, Canadians are involved.'

I shook my head. 'It's not that simple. They've a dozen who know Tangier better and they've other Canadians.'

'But perhaps not a Canadian who knows Tangier.'

'I'm sticking to my hunch. Anyway, to hell with it. Let's relax. I'll fish, and you swim, if you want.'

Since we were inside a small cove near Gibraltar's southern point, I lowered the sail and threw out a small anchor into what I judged to be about twenty feet of water. I was wrong, for it plummeted farther and hung suspended at the end of its line with the bottom several feet below. We drifted until the anchor caught, bringing the bow up into the wind, and were about fifty feet from shore.

Meanwhile, Sandra had removed her blouse and slacks, revealing a tiny bikini and an expanse of tanned skin. Her figure was wonderful, and the bikini barely enclosed her full, high breasts. As she put on a bathing cap, I watched her breasts move tightly.

'Wow!' I said.

She stuck her tongue out at me, then gracefully dived over the side from the cockpit. She surfaced several feet away, swam ten yards using an efficient crawl, and stopped to call to me: 'Come on in; it's great.'

'No, I'll do some fishing until I'm sure the anchor isn't dragging. Why not see whether we can beach the dinghy?'

She swam ashore, and I baited a hook and threw it over the side. I had stripped to my trunks and sat near the mast, thinking about our assignment in Tangier.

A peculiar feature of the case was Grant's conviction that the resident was British or American. This ran against Russian policy, for when the Red Army took over foreign intelligence after Beria's death, they insisted on Russian-born residents. This qualification had been dictated by the defection of some non-Russian residents who had become disenchanted with the Kremlin's brand of imperialism. Although they still recruited foreigners, they were used at lower levels. Now, residents were motivated by professionalism and patriotism, not idealism, a hazardous characteristic in view of Russia's materialistic policies, especially when animating foreigners.

Yet Grant, with his knowledge of their organization, was convinced the Tangier resident was either an Englishman, an American, or a Canadian. This contradiction might follow from the Russian practice of an agent's adopting a foreigner's identity. Occasionally they have been uncovered, masquerading as an actual citizen living elsewhere in the country. When questioned, the person whose identity has been usurped has proved his ignorance of his double and usually cannot even guess why his identity was chosen. From their training centres, the Russians

also sent other doubles in the guise of foreign nationals who remained behind the curtain or who were not known to have died there naturally or otherwise.

Much had been made of the clue that the resident's first language was English and second Spanish. My guess was that his first language was Russian, his second English, and his third Spanish, for he had come to Tangier in the English-speaking identity of either Rogers, Welch, or Johnson. Years ago, one of them had lost his identity to a Russian, who some three years ago had been named resident in Tangier. Apparently ignorant of Spanish, he would not have been observed learning it from a Russian-Spanish grammar or records.

Probably Rogers could be dismissed as a suspect, for he could be traced back to 1934, when he was a crooked barrow boy in London. No one had taken over his identity because he had been recorded in Tangier ever since and had even been a British agent during the war. But he might be the last cut-out in the web surrounding the resident and also his deputy.

Welch's history, as sketched by Harvey, was vaguer, because the British could not ask the F. B. I. leading questions about an American without inviting an independent investigation. Knowing of the Tangier resident, the American I. S. would follow any clue, despite denials, and confuse the trail as American and British agents futilely traced and competed with each other. Washington and London cooperated, but not at the operational level, for they never revealed to one another their respective agents. But it might not arouse too much American curiosity to check Welch's finger-prints against those on his military file, though if he were a Russian national, his recorded life back to pre-war years would conform to his cover story. Since the British believed he had served in American wartime intelligence, this cover would be solidly built.

Although I could not dismiss Welch, I felt safe in concentrating on Johnson, who I was convinced was the resident and a Russian national. Somewhere in his past was an hiatus, during which the Canadian-born Johnson had been replaced by a

Russian. It could not have been when he left the wholesaler of foodstuffs because he had maintained his sales connections on American bases. First, he had sold food, then liquor, either job, incidentally, an excellent cover for a Russian agent. Obviously, the break had been earlier, and his finger-prints in Ottawa military records might give a hint.

As for my suspicion that I had been chosen for the assignment because of some connection with the real Johnson, I had no clues. Of some interest was the name of Johnson's liquor store; Mount Royal was a name associated with Montreal, my birth-place. If he were a childhood friend or acquaintance, I could not recall him and I have a retentive memory.

Naturally, Johnson's cover would be finely wrought. The date of his joining the Canadian army might prove interesting, for after the Nazi invasion of Russia in 1941, communists no longer regarded the war as imperialistic. His Canadian nationality made him doubly suspect because Canadian documentation was easily obtained. In rural Canada, birth records were often kept in wooden parish churches, which were occasionally destroyed by fire. As for Canadian passports, the Russians had an entrée into an issuing office, a fact revealed in the spy trials of 1946. Indeed, many of their agents, including Trotsky's killer, had carried ones issued by this office.

Johnson's Tangier roles of salesman, liquor retailer, then banker provided him with good cover. In his sales capacity, he could establish contacts on the bases, while his store offered his cut-outs a means of communication. Banking was an even better front, for it gave him access to economic intelligence and permitted him to handle large sums of money. In the receipt and payment of funds required for a spy network, agents have occasionally drawn attention to themselves by not having valid explanations for every detail of their finances.

I thought a connection existed between the resident and the contraband racket. Why did crooks associate with intriguers? Why was Lesnick, a presumed senior agent, such a mercenary and marking time as a contrabander? How did Tocco know that

Strauss was running arms, though he may have had a spy aboard the German's boat? Who had selected Strauss as a potential gun-runner? Johnson might be the link, for some Tangier banks were directly involved in the cigarette racket.

I realized that without even meeting Johnson I had convicted him. Undoubtedly, I was prejudiced by the Canadian angle and had built my hypothesis accordingly. Yet, I had to start somewhere in the investigation of three men, two of whom were prime suspects. Still chimerical was the threat of a nuclear explosion, which theory I had reared on even frailer foundations.

Treading water ten yards away, Sandra yelled: 'Can I come back or will I scare the fish?'

'Come on. There aren't any.'

She swam over, and I helped her aboard. As she towelled herself, I watched the movements of her breasts. I guessed she would be a lively companion in bed, for her sensuous lips and sparkling eyes hinted at a passionate, questing nature. But I realized the futility of my speculations; she was certainly not for me. Perhaps, after we had completed our assignment in Tangier . . .

I dived into the water, swam briskly for five minutes, and returned to the dinghy. As I pulled myself aboard, she said:

'You swim very well. Why come back so soon?'

'I had to cool off. That bikini's too much.'

'You poor boy. Why?'

'Don't be bitchy,' I grinned. 'You bloody well know why!'

Her face was amused, and her tone cool. 'What did you decide after you cooled off?'

'Maybe I'll tell you when we're finished in Tangier.'

'That's the first sensible idea you've had about me yet.'

'Is that a promise?'

'No. And let's change the subject. Where do we picnic?'

'Can I beach the dinghy over there?' I said, pointing at the shore.

'It's too rocky; let's have it here.'

We had a drink, then ate lunch. Later, we sailed out on the bay, trolling a spinner. At five o'clock, we returned to the yacht club, where I phoned Harvey.

'This is Oscar,' I said. I want to see you as soon as possible.

'Sure, any time.'

'I'll be there in 45 minutes.'

'Right,' he said and hung up.

Going back to the hotel, I told Sandra she had 30 minutes to change for our evening in Spain.

'All right, master,' she smiled. 'I'll do it in 20.'

She did and we reached Harvey's office ahead of schedule. After greeting us, he looked at me curiously.

'First,' I said, 'have you checked the finger-prints of Johnson and Welch against their military files?'

'Wrong track,' he grinned. 'If they did substitute, it was earlier.'

'Why "if". It couldn't be anything else.'

He shrugged. 'You tell me; we don't know.'

Sandra broke in: 'What are you two talking about?'

'I'll tell you later,' I said. 'Now, Phil, level with me: do you favour the substitution theory?'

'We don't know, and I'm really levelling. It's your problem.'

'Dammit,' I exploded. 'Stop stalling!'

He just stared at me, so I continued: 'Secondly, do you have any information about the fencing of millions of dollars of securities stolen in the U. S. and Canada?'

'Never heard of it.'

'I want you to contact the F. B. I. and the R. C. M. P. to see whether any of these securities have turned up in Tangier or can be traced back to Tangier. Until recently, no one stole securities; now a black market exists for disposing of them at a discount, usually outside North America. Also find out whether much counterfeit currency, traveller's cheques, or securities have been passed in Tangier during the past year. You probably don't know it, but developments in photo-lithography make counterfeiting most attractive nowadays.'

'You'll have to tell me more. It doesn't relate to your assignment.'

'The hell it doesn't. I think I see a link between the Mafia and the spy master.'

'What's the Mafia got to do with it?'

I pounded a fist on his desk: 'Don't be a bone-head! The Mafia smuggles the stolen securities and funny money out of the States and Canada. They have connections in Tangier on contraband cigarettes. Why not the rest?'

He nodded. 'I'll try to persuade Grant to authorize those queries. You realize he's going to accuse you of jumping to conclusions about the resident?'

'Just get me the information.'

After Harvey poured drinks, I said: 'Thirdly, I want your surveillance teams. Are they still there?'

'One is. What do you want it for?'

'Find the flat where the resident keeps his files.'

'Why wouldn't he keep them in the vaults . . .' he started.

I laughed. 'Now who's jumping to conclusions?'

'I'm not talking about a particular vault.'

'Rubbish! Anyway, I don't like the vaults. He would have to share the combination with someone else. You think all his employees are brainless, and he probably does too. Put the surveillance team back on Serrano and Johnson to find the flat. The only conditions I can think of are that it would be guarded constantly, perhaps with a family having two or three men and maybe some kids over eight.'

'Why kids?'

'The three toy typewriters used to write the intercepts.'

He grinned. 'It's weak, but it's not a bad idea.'

'Have you checked the toy stores in Tangier?'

'A Hindu store sells them. It's legitimate.'

Studying him, I sipped my drink, then asked: 'Have you or the Americans heard any rumours of a projected nuclear explosion on their bases in Morocco?'

'What!' he barked. 'Where did you hear that?'

'No, no. I asked you.'

His voice was hard. 'Where did you hear it?'

'By putting two and two together and getting eight. Is there anything to it?'

'Let's hear about this two and two.'

'Get stuffed! You haven't answered me yet.'

He lit a cigarette and said: 'That rumour came down to me from London about six months ago. We picked it up at the highest level of intelligence we maintain. Even I know nothing more. So where did you get it?'

'Remember: two and two.'

'That's enough, Robert,' he snapped. 'I have to pass this on to Grant, so tell me where you picked it up.'

'You answer my questions, and I'll tell you.'

'This isn't a game!'

'Don't I know it,' I laughed. 'While you sit on your butt here, I take the chances. So you can trade. Otherwise, I have another question.'

'What?'

'Lesnick doesn't ring true to me.'

'Why?'

'I think he's too interested in making a buck to be an important agent.'

He started, then said: 'He's an important agent, all right. Now, tell me how you got on to the nuclear . . .'

'Not tonight, Phil,' I interrupted. 'I offered you a trade, and you turned it down. But you confirmed two things: first, you know something about a projected nuclear explosion; and, secondly, you know Lesnick's a mercenary. Thanks, it all helps.'

I got up and turned to Sandra. 'Let's go, doll, we've got a date.'

Harvey stood up, glowering at me. 'Go ahead, Miss Grant, I don't hold you responsible for this idiot.'

We crossed into Spain, dined reasonably well at a hotel in Algieras, then went to a nearby village, inhabited mainly by English

and American remittance men and women. Because of their antics, the village has been nicknamed Drunkville and strives to maintain its disrepute twenty-four hours daily. The frolics of the expatriates occasionally scandalize the Spanish authorities, who expel them from the country.

As we walked along the main street, we heard drunken English voices singing in a bar. From another, lurched a couple supporting each other and exchanging insults.

'You dirty little bitch,' growled the man, 'wait'll I get you home.'

'Shut up, you fat slob,' snarled the woman. 'No nookie for you tonight!'

We found a quiet bar with one other customer, a seedy American male beatnik, wearing a filthy, white sweat-shirt. We had a few drinks, but left when a well-dressed Englishman staggered in from outside and removed and offered Sandra his glass eye as a canapé. Since it was 11 o'clock we returned to our hotel in Gibraltar. I did not even try to kiss her before leaving her at her door.

Chapter II

We flew to Tangier the next morning and settled into the house under Larry Smith's supervision. After he left, I spent the rest of the morning working on my script, later swimming with Sandra in the cove below the house. Following lunch and a siesta, I worked again on the script and swam with Sandra in the evening. We dined early, then I caught up on my newspaper reading, while Sandra retyped my copy. This division of the day developed into a routine lasting a week, as I awaited reports from Gomez on the surveillance team. During that time we only visited the city to check the post box, sending the servants to buy what we needed. The script progressed rapidly, and, at last, I relaxed in the leisurely vacation I had sought when I left London.

But at the end of the week, when I went into the city to find the post box still empty, I had to start burrowing. I called on Gomez, who told me Harvey was evaluating the surveillance reports and would send any leads he uncovered. Gomez had no report from Rayburn nor anything else for me, so I left and phoned Sandra that I would return late.

At eight o'clock, I walked into a small bar, run by a Sam Wright, whom I knew from the past. His knowledge of Tangier and its resident and visiting villains was extensive. He was alone, pouring Dutch whisky through a funnel into a bottle bearing a dirty lable of a proprietary brand of scotch.

'Caught you, you old bastard!' I greeted him, holding out a hand.

'Hello, Robert,' he said. 'I heard you were on the mountain

with a bird. You been too busy giving her one to come in and see me, eh?’

We shook hands, and I said: ‘Why don’t you get a new bottle? That label’s too grubby to fool anyone.’

‘Who cares? The mugs never see me in my role as an alchemist and I give ’em a hard time if they question my drinks. What’ll you have?’

‘Gin, if you’ll join me. Otherwise, I don’t know.’

‘Don’t worry, I drink it myself. Where’s this bird I’ve heard about?’

‘She’s just my secretary and she’s home typing the script. Where did you hear about her?’

He ran his tongue around his lips. ‘My spies have orders to report the arrival of any good looking. The ones watching the beach below your house say she’s a blonde peacherino.’

He had yet to pour my drink, having more interest in displaying his knowledge. Meanwhile, an Arab had entered and called him to the other end of the bar, where they whispered. Sam shook his head vigorously when the Arab showed him something hidden from me. The Arab left, and I reminded Sam of my drink.

As he poured it, I studied him. His toughness was more mental than physical, as it is with most hard men, for he was 45, standing five feet, ten inches, and weighing 160 pounds. Since his muscles were no longer sinewy and his stamina bad, he relied on speed and ferocity to overpower stronger but less violent opponents. To maintain his reputation, he fought with little provocation, though, as he admitted, he was usually lost if the fight lasted thirty seconds.

‘What did the Arab want?’ I asked.

‘Hawking a shooter he said he’d nicked from a boat. But I keep my nose clean these days. I sussed he was a copper, though I’ve never seen his evil bracket.’

He breathed on several glasses and polished them, then rolled a cigarette between his fingers so that most of the tobacco fell to the counter. Opening a small metal box he kept in the cash

drawer, he poured into his hand some *kif*, the local marijuana, and worked it into the cigarette. He lit it and exhaled blissfully.

'That's good green,' he smiled. 'I've got a special runner bringing it in a cleft stick from the mountains. Care to burn a little?'

'No thanks. I prefer my kicks from booze.'

'So do I, but I get drunk too quickly for this lark. Hell, I might end up serving the mugs expensive scotch in large measures.'

As he decanted more Dutch whisky, he continued: 'The customers shouldn't complain. I could use Jap whisky. Jesus, that's rough! How did you like your yacht trip?'

'Too damned long. I got what I wanted in a couple of weeks, but we were out for six.'

'They've a right collection of lunatics on that boat, but they're good seamen. What do you think of the sexual habits of the captain and Birdie?'

'A bit advanced.'

'I'll say. They never heard of free tail.'

He laughed, then looked at me thoughtfully. 'You've got plenty of dropsy, Robert. Why not invest some in a little salvage scheme a pal of mine is working on. There's a German sub sunk on a sandbank south of . . .'

'Come off it,' I interrupted. 'I've heard that one before.'

'No, this is straight.'

I grinned. 'Try the banks. You've got plenty of them here. I hear the Wall Street Bank'll do anything.'

'Honest Stan's bank? Yeah, he's so bent, he probably would. We call him the Honest Banker: he never stole the Bank of England. Say, he's a Canadian like you. Do you know him?'

'No.'

'You're lucky; he's a horror. He's smarmy and he'd screw the last penny out of a starving orphan. I had to put a sickener on him the other night. He's full of piss and wind, but as yellow as a golden guinea.'

'What happened?'

'He rented my girl-friend's flat in Madrid for a couple of weeks

this summer. She checked it recently and wrote me that Honest Stan had broken a toilet bowl and wouldn't pay. So I ran into him in the Copa and said: "You're the geezer who broke up my girl-friend's pet can! When are you going to pay?"

'He replied: "It's none of your business." So I said: "Listen, pus-gut, you pay or I'll show you up for the lily-livered bastard you are!" He got up saying something about, "What did you do during the war? Spend it in jail?" So I butted him with the hairy mallet, and that was the end of the fight.'

'Charming,' I said. 'What else is wrong with Honest Stan? Is he queer too?'

'No, that's about the only thing you can say for him. He fancies them young and uses all the whore-houses. I hear he's a bit kinky, but I haven't learned how yet. You seen his trouble-and-strife?'

'No.'

He chuckled. 'Well, I don't blame him for using whores, for he's married to a little Dutch bitch with a mean, pinched face. My spies report she may be doing a trick with those lessies who live next to you.'

A short, rotund man in his fifties entered and ordered a drink. Sam poured it, saying:

'Fearless, I don't think you've met my friend, Robert. Robert, this is Fearless Fred, the world's only practising white witch doctor. How's sorcery, Doc?'

'Not so good, but I can pay for my drink.'

'No consultations today?' I asked.

'He does it by mail with Black Africa,' explained Sam. 'He's got them believing he's sitting on a mountain peak, communing with nature. The same runner who brings my *kif* in the cleft stick is supposed to carry the mail for Fearless. Surely, you had one client today?'

'Yes, one.'

Sam grinned at me. 'Come on, Fearless, give us a giggle.'

Fearless lit a cigarette and shrugged. 'Well, I suppose I could forget my sorcerer's oath. He's clerk in a store in Kenya who

can't sleep at night and thinks a spell has been cast over him by another clerk. He says the job of senior clerk is vacant, and the two are competing for the promotion. Because of the spell, he shows up late for work and falls asleep at his desk. The boss told my patient he'll get the sack if he keeps it up. So he wrote me.'

'What was your diagnosis?' asked Sam.

'Undoubtedly he's bewitched. I told him to get up at midnight during the next full moon and run three miles through the bush in a northeasterly direction, to where he'll find a magic clearing. He's bound to find a clearing, magic or otherwise. He's to carry a chicken, which he beheads there. He buries the head at one point of the compass, the liver at another, the heart at a third, and the body at the fourth. Then he's to run home and repeat the procedure every night until the next full moon.'

'How is he exorcized?' I asked.

'By running six miles through the bush every night - he's bound to sleep.'

I laughed. 'How much do you charge for the consultation?'

'It's a set fee of two quid for disenchantment,' grinned Fearless. 'He buys or steals his own chickens.'

Sam cleared his throat noisily and spat through the door. 'Robert, Fearless tried to put the bite on Honest Stan to advertise his witchcraft lark in American magazines. The Honest Banker said he'd stand for it, but wanted 50 per cent interest on the loan.'

Fearless nodded. 'Not quite right, Sam - 40 per cent.'

'There, what did I tell you, Robert!' exploded Sam. 'Just think of all those corn-fed servicemen from the Middle West investing in such a bank. Jesus, an honest thief like me has to go straight running a poxy bar!'

He burst out laughing and kept at it until Fearless and I had joined him. It was part of his story-telling technique, for he prized laughter and had to cap other people's amusing or outrageous tales. If his addition was anti-climactic, a burst of infectious laughter usually enhanced it. Although he preferred

laughter, he delighted as well in shocking or angering his audience.

'Well, Sam,' I said, 'I'm off to the Vendome. I'll be in regularly now that I've the script under control.'

He shook a finger at me. 'Be careful up there you aren't raped by one of the witches. I hear they're getting very randy.'

'Who are they?' I asked.

'Four old bags, refugees from the Carpathians.'

'Is one a fat, blonde American, called Helen?'

'You know her, eh? You'd better let me mark your card.'

I shuddered. 'It's unnecessary, but give me another drink. Anyone else I should be warned against?'

'Rosie, the Dutch one, is away,' Sam said, ignoring my request for a drink and warming to his subject. 'She's older than God and always shrieking for someone to give her one. Now, she's with her boy-friend, if you can picture such a creature. According to her, he's the purser on a French liner. Actually, he's the baggage master on the Gibraltar tender, which is appropriate.'

He stuffed another cigarette with marijuana and lit it. 'Time to turn it on again. Now, what else should I warn you about?'

'The poufs?' suggested Fearless.

'By God, yes! Since you've been away – what is it: a couple of years? – a ship's been arriving monthly from New York. We call it the "Faggots' Special", for it brings in gaggles of poufs.'

'Don't forget the Axis,' reminded Fearless.

Sam snorted: 'That's bloody horrifying! You've heard of the Rome-Berlin Axis, Robert. Well, there's a new one on the maps: it's the Pouf Axis between Tangier and Athens. They swish back and forth with stops for revolting practices at such satellites as Ibiza, in the Balearics, and Torremolinos, in southern Spain. My God, the imagination boggles!'

He poured me a drink. 'Have this on the house. It'll steady your nerves. You know it's dangerous some nights in the Vendome.'

I drained most of the glass and took the bait. 'Why?'

'You know the way those Arab bits of trade lurk outside the entrance. It occurred to me it could be dangerous if a new one appeared in the doorway. Why that gaggle of poufs would run you down, if you got in the way. What a way to snuff it, eh? Killed in a stampede of poufs!'

He howled with laughter, but subsided when I waved at him and started out.

'Look after yourself,' he called.

As I walked away, I decided to go to the Madison. Sam had not shocked me; I knew and respected too many homosexuals in show business to share his violent opinions of them. But the Vendome's owner, a young English homosexual, was the worst pianist I have ever heard perform publicly. Unfortunately, he provided the bar's entertainment, frequently increasing the discordance by singing in a voice better suited to bawling orders in a fish-and-chip shop.

I had originally considered the Vendome, for the owner loved to gossip and might provide scurrilous details about Johnson. But he could be debriefed later, Sam and Fearless having supplied enough gossip for a start. Neither was a valid source of detailed information, but they could spot a scoundrel and contribute to the general outline of Johnson's character. To use him, we had to find his flaws, which might embrace other vices besides corruption.

My assignment required me to gravitate to Johnson and to cultivate him, an end more easily attained in the Madison than in the Vendome. It was Saturday night and customary, therefore, for many of Tangier's prosperous English-speaking businessmen to forgather there. Elsewhere, bankers may eschew bars, but Tangier defies normal comparisons.

Arriving there, I entered and spotted a man at a table who resembled the description I had of Johnson. Few people sat at the bar, so I chose a stool away from other clients and affording me a clear view of the man I considered my quarry.

Hal, the owner, served me, saying:

'Good to see you, Robert. What've you been doing?'

'Working hard,' I replied. 'It's my first night on the town, and I've just come from Sam's bar.'

'What lies is he telling tonight?'

'Some beauties about a local banker called Honest Stan.'

'Sh,' he whispered, 'he's right over there.'

In gesturing, he confirmed my suspicions.

'Sam doesn't think much of him,' I said. 'What's he like?'

As I had expected, Hal's reply was non-committal. After he left me to attend other clients, I studied Johnson. He lived up to my image of him not only as a salesman vulgar enough to ingratiate himself with buyers for sergeants' messes but also as a banker corrupt enough to gull his investors. His clothing was also what I would have expected of a former salesman with Canadian and English backgrounds. The effect was garish, but the tailoring conservative. His sports jacket was modestly cut from shiny black material flecked with silver and was unbuttoned to display a scarlet vest and loud tie.

According to the records, he was 41, but looked older, especially about his baggy eyes. His height was five feet, nine inches, and he weighed a paunchy 175 pounds, a 25-pound increase since the war. His face was round and double-chinned, featuring bright eyes, and sensuous lips. No racial characteristic predominated, though he might have semitic blood, absorbed in a national background that could obviously range from Anglo-Saxon to Middle European to Russian. On the surface, he had the air of an oriental bazaar-keeper, combining deviousness, suavity, and conviviality.

As far as I knew, I had never seen him before; nor did he remind me of anyone in Montreal twenty years ago. Perhaps I erred, but I suspected any link between us existed then before my family moved to Mexico in 1936. He would have been twenty-one, and I sixteen, a gap in years too great to have been bridged by friendship, but I could not even place him as a neighbour or family acquaintance.

Presumably, the woman who sat across from him was his wife, a trim blonde in her early twenties. Glasses hid her eyes, but

Sam's description of her having a mean, pinched face was reasonably true. The other couple at the table did not interest me, for I knew the husband slightly, an American running a bottling plan in Tangier.

From what I could overhear, Johnson dominated the conversation with salty and sarcastic quips, which his wife confused with humour. Although she giggled, she often affected shock and refinement, trying to restrain him, which apparently egged him on to stronger essays at vulgarity.

After one sally, she shrieked: 'Oh, Stan, stop it. People can hear you.'

Then turning to the other woman at the table, she added: 'Stan's terrible – but so funny.'

I signalled Hal for a refill, which he gave me, saying:

'Want to meet Honest Stan? He's a fellow Canadian.'

'No point in rushing it. I'm here for a couple of months.'

'O.K,' he said, leaving me again.

Several minutes later, a heavy, flabby man took the adjoining stool and nodded to me. He held the leash of a large, nondescript dog, which stood quietly beside his stool. I was in luck: he had to be Welch, my other prime suspect.

He flagged Hal down, ordered a drink, then said to me: 'Not too crowded tonight.'

'Oh yes?' I replied.

'Usually the joint's jumping Saturdays.'

Hal arrived with the drink and said: 'You two writers know one another?'

'Just started to talk,' I replied.

'John Welch: Robert Belcourt,' said Hal, then left us.

Welch and I shook hands, after which he said:

'Holidaying here?'

'Yes. And working.'

'Where do you work normally?'

'England.'

'What do you write?'

'I'm a film script-writer - that's a higher priced scrivener without morals.'

He studied me. 'You sound bitter. Were you chased out of Hollywood by McCarthy?'

'Hell, no!' I laughed. 'I've never even seen the place.'

'That's odd, isn't it: an American working in England?'

After I corrected him, we discussed our respective writing fields, though he kept returning to the iniquities of McCarthyism. I had the impression he was trying to draw forthright opinions from me, so whatever path he led me down I promptly made a detour into fuzzy-minded liberalism. Whether he sought a radical or reactionary declaration, I could not determine, since he only condemned McCarthyism and withheld his other political ideals. Had he been more profound or even better read, he would have realized he dealt with a fraud, for I freely misquoted every political philosopher whose name I could recall. If I laboured a point, as I did several times, he impatiently awaited a pause in my flow to switch the subject back to writing. But he could not resist for long the tempting topic of McCarthyism.

He said he wrote for several newspapers and, when pressed, identified them as the most sensational in Britain and the States. Apparently, he also contributed articles to American magazines, featuring nudes and breathless prose, and had had a book published about Americans living in Europe and North Africa.

These revelations were made in a flat, nasal tone, which was the speech of the farming area in northern New York state, where he had been reared. In fact, he displayed other characteristics of the natives of this region, which I recalled from boyhood holidays. He was ponderous, shrewd, and cautious and sceptical of sophistication and material luxury. Physically he was unprepossessing. In his mid-forties, he stood five feet, ten inches, and weighed 200 pounds. He tried to disguise his baldness by carefully spreading the surviving hairs over his pate. Glasses covered his bulging eyes, and he seemed to take pride in the soup-straining moustache he patted constantly.

Suddenly, Johnson stood between us, saying to Welch:

'Come and join us for supper at the flat, John. We've an extra girl, and she may be good for what ails you.'

Welch looked over at Johnson's table. 'Not bad, Stan. Why do you want to give her away? It's not in character.'

'There isn't very much I can do about it,' laughed Johnson. 'You don't know her?'

'No.'

'Betty Hill from Torremolinos: a sex-pot! Hell, she's so well known there, they're thinking of having her certified by the Diners' Club.'

Welch groaned. 'I should have known.'

'I don't think you'll have to play your cards too skilfully,' grinned Johnson. Apparently, he had adjudged me a man of the world, for his smiling eyes had included me in his audience. Welch stole another look at the woman and said:

'O.K, count me in. By the way, Stan, meet a fellow-Canadian, Robert Belcourt. Robert, this is Stan Johnson.'

As we shook hands, I said hello, and Johnson beamed happily, averring he was pleased to meet me. I offered him a drink which he declined with a fulsome plea that he had to leave immediately.

'Where are you from in Canada?' he asked.

'Montreal.'

'So am I. We must celebrate old home-week some time.'

'Robert is out here working on a film script,' said Welch.

'Always glad to meet a member of the writing profession,' said Johnson, adding with a pseudo-apologetic air: 'Forgive me for getting in a plug, but I run a bank here and might be able to help you with the tax-man. But we can discuss it some other time. Say, why don't you join us?'

It was pushing my luck. 'No thanks,' I said, 'I'm meeting someone here. But I'll come into the bank some time. Where is it?'

He shook his head wearily. 'All that advertising, and still nobody knows. Perhaps we could do a deal: I'll help you with the

tax-man, and you write me better advertising copy. Anyway, it's the Bank of Wall Street Foreign, on Rue Goya. Coming in Monday morning?'

'Better make it later in the week. I'm very busy, but I'll phone you.'

'O.K., Robert, pleased to meet you. If you can't be good tonight, be careful. Come on, John.'

Laughing happily, he walked away with Welch, who waved at me. Within minutes, the six of them left the bar, Johnson blowing kisses to Hal and assuring him he would be back tomorrow.

I ordered another drink, my eighth, and wondered if Joe Lesnick would come in. It was 10.45, and I had no chance of remaining sober unless he arrived soon. I decided to give him another twenty minutes and, as a precaution, took the bar stool nearest the telephone.

Lesnick arrived minutes before my deadline and ordered drinks for us. He said he had just then returned from the southern zone of Morocco, where he had spent three days trying to sell German beer on the American bases.

'I'll just phone the girl-friend,' he said 'to tell her I'm at stud again.'

As he picked up the telephone on the wall over my left shoulder, I started the tape recorder contained in a packet of cigarettes, which I kept on my lap out of his vision. Normally, I would have taken a cigarette from it and left the packet on the bar, but Lesnick might have recognized it for what it was. He dialled and waited. Eventually, he started to talk, his side of the conversation going:

'It's Joe. I just got back.'

'No, nothing.'

'O.K.'

He hung up, sat down beside me, and nodded leeringly. We chattered for another fifteen minutes, during which he criticized the United States Air Force for not buying his beer at the cheap prices he quoted.

'Why they're so stupid,' he said, 'they even have a brother of mine as a sergeant.'

'The American Air Force?' I asked.

'Sure. He's been with them so long I'm out of touch. Considering some of the officers I dealt with down there, he should be a general. God, what a stupid shower!'

I finished my drink and admitted drunkenness and a craving for sleep. After telephoning for a taxi, I said good night to Lesnick and left to stand in the fresh air of the street. During the ride back to the house, I dozed off once.

The taxi left me at the gate, and I rang the bell, which Sandra answered in five minutes.

'Bit drunk, Robert,' she asked, turning to watch me follow her into the house.

'Not me, baby.'

After she closed the door and turned to me, I grabbed her by the shoulders and kissed her soundly on the mouth. She struggled briefly, then relaxed against me, her breasts pushing against my chest. When I cupped one of them in my right palm, she pushed me away.

She was angry. 'You promised . . .'

'Sorry, doll,' I said. 'I forgot myself.'

'Well, don't let it happen again,' she snapped, then relenting, asked:

'How did it go?'

'I'll tell you in the morning. We might be in business.'

Chapter 12

The next morning, my hang-over under reasonable control, I joined Sandra in the garden. She was stretched out on an air mattress, sunning herself and reading with a transistor radio playing from a nearby table. Her lush figure no longer bothered me as much as it had, or so I liked to think, but I still unconsciously ran my eyes over it with emotions that were not quite platonic. When I arrived, carrying a shopping basket and another mattress, she turned on her back and asked me about my hang-over. As I mumbled something, I could not keep my eyes from the magnificent breasts jutting upwards beneath a halter that barely contained them and certainly did not have to support them.

'Take a cold shower!' she burst out laughing. 'How can we talk with you leering like a dirty old man.'

'I'm a dirty young man and I need more than a cold shower.'

'Well, get on with it. I hear the town's still wide open.'

I dropped the air mattress beside her, peeled off my shirt, and lay down. Reaching into the basket, I removed several objects.

'Here's a pencil and paper,' I said. 'I want you to check what I taped last night.'

I removed the recorder from the packet of cigarettes, slowed the speed, and turned it to replay. After we listened to Lesnick dialling, I turned it off.

'What have you got?' I asked.

'13566.'

'So have I. But let's have it again. I'm unsure about the six clicks in the last number.'

After the replay, she said: 'No doubt in my mind. It's 13566.'

I nodded and opened the Tangier telephone directory to the rear section, where the numbers were given in numerical order with the names of the subscribers beside them in corresponding columns.

'It's unlisted,' I said, then told her about the circumstances of the call.

When I had finished, she said: 'It *could* be his girlfriend.'

'Of course. But I want you to get Gomez to work on it tomorrow. Also have him check with the R. C. M. P. and F. B. I. to dig up a brother of Lesnick's who's been in the American air force for many years. He is or was a sergeant.'

I paused, then tapped my pencil against the mattress for emphasis. 'What's far more important is that we should have Johnson, Serrano, and Lesnick under 24-hour surveillance. I think our cheap bosses are only covering the first two with one team. Find out whether the shadowers are working with beams. They should be, because I want recorded any possible conversations and telephone dialling clicks.

'If you can't convince Gomez, tell him I intend to raise bloody hell with Gibraltar and London. When Strauss docks his contrabander next, I want him followed too. If they haven't got the men, put Rayburn on it with a beam. Strauss has to report in by telephone, and I want to know the bloody number.'

She smiled. 'Don't get so worked up; they may not have enough people.'

'God damn it!' I exploded. 'Tell him to get them.'

'Robert, I'm going to get a drink. Would one help you?'

'I'd love one.'

She got up and, knowing my eyes followed her, exaggerated the undulation of her hips as she walked to the house. At the steps to the terrace, she turned and thumbed her nose at me. I cursed audibly and decided alcohol had weakened my immunity. Perhaps her advice was sound, and I should satisfy my unrequited lust before even the witches became glamorous.

She returned, gave me a drink, and lay down again.

I looked at her. 'I've got a hunch you won't be working for me much longer.'

She stared at me thoughtfully, but said nothing.

'I met both Welch and Johnson last night,' I continued. 'Welch seems to ring true, so I'm going to concentrate even more on Johnson. He's such a horror, he has to be seen to be appreciated. He's as randy as hell, and I may turn you loose on him. I'm going to see him about my tax problems later in the week, and you'll come with me.'

'How did he convince you he's the resident?'

'Christ, that's the trouble! He convinced me he's a genuine salesman and banker who knows How to Make Friends and Influence People in the small-time North American business tradition. He's perfect in his role: vulgarity, backslapping, commercial keenness, ingratiating manner, boys-will-be-boys-about-sex – the bloody lot. He's as North American as mum's apple pie or – to bring it closer – French Canadian pea soup. The phoney bonhomie can be turned on like tap water. Hell, I bet he smiles in his sleep.'

'Well, why . . .?' she started.

'Process of elimination,' I interrupted. 'I never liked Rogers as a Russian national, and Welch seems genuine. No Russian double could duplicate his accent; it's almost a dialect. So it has to be Johnson. His accent, incidentally, is undistinguished and perfect for his role. You hear it in most of Canada and, with the exception of one or two minor speech peculiarities, also in the northeastern United States.'

She sat up and hugged her knees. 'I hope you're not going off half-cocked. Suppose the resident's someone else we don't even know about?'

'You know better than that. Harvey didn't reveal all his information, but he's convinced it's one of those three. That's good enough for me. As you know, I've always favoured Johnson; now I'm convinced he's our boy. I'm no closer to the connection between us, though it has to be a link made twenty years ago in Montreal.'

'Do you think we can use him?'

I shrugged. 'Everything hinges on whether he's a resident or a business man. When he left Russia years ago, he was 100 per cent agent, dedicated and, presumably, honest. In the interim, he's developed an aptitude for commerce, rackets, and fraud. Now, I'd guess he's 75 per cent business, mostly crooked, and 25 per cent intelligence, perhaps rather indifferent. And it might go as high as 90 per cent commerce and fraud.'

'When we get the goods on him, we won't be dealing with a true Russian agent. They're 100 per cent agent. You can threaten them with forty years in jail, and they won't even tell you their real first names. Johnson's been a small-time business man since the war; now, he's made it crookedly and is relatively rolling in money. When we squeeze him, he'll forget his 10 to 25 per cent intelligence background – but fast. And since he's a greedy crook, he'll break even faster.'

She lit two cigarettes, handing me one. 'Where do I come in?'

'Gossip has it that Johnson's wife is a lesbian. Whether she is or not, his sex life isn't too satisfactory. He chases whores, according to gossip. I'm going to try to track down the lesbian angle and, if true, let him know about it. It should prove quite a jolt. He's a sucker for young blondes, and you'll be part of the squeeze play. It's a rotten role, but it's what you came out here for.'

She turned away from me and got up. 'You don't have to be so damned brutal!'

'Sandra, I could say a lot of things that wouldn't help both of us. So I'll keep it impersonal. One thing I want you to do now is make friends with the two lesbians who have the house over there.'

She laughed feebly. 'Not that too!'

'I want you to get to know them. Borrow a cup of sugar or do something neighbourly. Invite them over for drinks or a meal, if you want. Johnson's wife is supposed to be having an affair with them, and I want to know if there's anything to it.'

She smiled in spite of herself. 'Thank God for that!'

'And that reminds me. Tell Gomez tomorrow I want someone on hand for photography and montage and I don't want to have to wait for the man to arrive from London. If the lesbian angle's true, I'll frame Johnson's wife with some photographs.'

'You rotten bastard!' she exploded. 'Suppose for once in your life you're wrong, and Johnson isn't the resident.'

'Stop it!' I snapped. 'Before I do anything, I'll convince your uncle that Johnson's our boy. I want the photography matter in hand. That's all. Leave the thinking to me; it's not your job.'

She stood over me, her eyes flashing. 'I have to! I can't think that way, thank God!'

I looked away from her, then said: 'Sandra, you're over your head in . . .'

But she was striding angrily to the house.

I went to the Vendome that night to talk to the owner. As I had expected, he was at the piano surrounded by his coterie of pederasts and attendant catamites. Eventually, he left them and came to the bar where I stood.

'Hello, Robert,' he said, 'I heard you were in town. What are you doing?'

'At the moment, I'm looking for crumpet, but I'm out here writing a film script.'

'I heard you were shackled up on the mountain with a beauty. Why play the field?'

I shook my head. 'She's my secretary. I don't mix business with pleasure.'

'My God!' he laughed. 'Morals and circumspection in the oddest of places. If you're looking for crumpet, why come here?'

'I saw a broad last night who gave me the eye. I was wondering whether she was on the town tonight.'

He was interested, for sex in any form intrigues most homosexuals and appeals to another of their frailties, their delight in scandal. Admittedly, he needed little stimulation, gossip being the main relaxation of most of Tangier's Anglo-American residents, homosexual or not.

'Who is she?' he asked. 'Maybe I can help the course of true love.'

'I saw her in the Madison, a trim blonde with a vulgar Canadian in a scarlet vest. I think he's a banker.'

He was almost convulsed with laughter, bending down and slapping his thigh. Gasping for breath, he finally blurted: 'Christ, that's the funniest thing I've heard in years.'

I affected annoyance. 'What's so bloody funny?'

'She's a roaring dike – a lesbian,' he exploded, laughing again.

'How do you know?' I snapped.

'Let's face it,' he smiled. 'I have my sources. There's a certain freemasonry between us. You live on the mountain, and I know some of your neighbours.'

I grimaced. 'Thanks for the tip. Where does the Canadian banker fit in?'

'He's her husband,' he grinned.

'Is he queer? I didn't think so.'

'No, just square.'

'I didn't even know they were married. He was telling someone at the bar she was a fast bit of crumpet.'

He turned to me, puzzled. 'Maybe we've got the wrong broad. He's vulgar, but he's not that bad. What else do you know about her?'

'Her name's Betty, isn't it?'

He grinned and clapped me on the back. 'My apologies, Robert. I thought you were slipping. It must be Betty Hill.'

'That's the name.'

'Don't worry, you're in business. She's got the roundest heels within a hundred miles. That rips hell out of my story, though, for I was going to dine out on your making a play for that dike, Jane Johnson. I've got to get back to the piano. See you around.'

Finishing my drink, I went to Sam's bar and walked in as he was ending a story.

'... I give his old woman a table-ender. It doesn't pay to take a diabolical liberty with me.'

While his audience of three men and a girl laughed, Sam

checked his appearance in a mirror opposite the bar, then combed his long hair. It was another of his mannerisms, performed every fifteen minutes or more frequently, if his stories were staged with gesticulations that disarranged his hair.

The three men were leaving, and Sam turned to me. 'Well, Robert, what'll it be?'

'Gin and tonic.'

The girl, the only other customer, was an unkempt brunette wearing the uniform of the female beatnik: shapeless black sweater, black skirt, and black stockings. Barely twenty, she was smoking *kif*.

'Sam,' she said in an American accent, 'you just told us you liked the Moslems of India. Why such a difference between them and the Moslems of Tangier?'

'The Pakistanis are like us,' he explained. 'We're Corsicans. That's the difference.'

Corsicans? I wondered, then realized what he meant. He peppered his speech with the mispronunciation and misuse of words, sometimes purposely. Since the beatnik stared at him blankly, I said:

'Caucasians.'

Sam stared at me sourly. It was his stage, and I was not welcome to share it.

'What I don't like about them here,' said the beatnik, 'is the way they follow me about. How would you stop them, Sam?'

'Kick 'em in the orchestras,' he suggested, warning me with a look to keep off stage.

'Orchestras?' she asked.

'Balls!' he barked. 'Orchestra stalls: balls. It's rhyming slang.'

'I suppose that's better than my way,' she said seriously. 'I yell at them in English, but they seem to understand the tone, if not the words.'

'What do you yell, dear?' he asked.

'"Fuck off!"' she shouted.

I choked on my drink, and Sam smiled weakly. She finished

her drink, said good-bye, and left. Sam silently poured me another drink, then said:

'Lively girl, that, Robert. You should've grabbed her. What did you do last night?'

'I went to the Madison and met your friend, Honest Stan. He seemed odd for a banker, even a Tangier one.'

'Hell, he's not odd; he's bent. Two of those fellows who just went out are as crafty a pair of con men as you'll find: Charlie Rosen and Jim Wilmot. Jim's Australian, and the best con men come from there. They've got some deal on with Honest Stan, but I don't know what it is.'

Sam paused to light a marijuana cigarette, then continued: 'A year ago, we had a Birmingham scoundrel named Robin out here blowing down our ear-holes. We called him Hood Robin, for he stole from the poor to give to the rich. He talked Honest Stan into financing his purchase of a boat. All he wanted to do was run guns. But he came unstuck, and the law expelled him.'

'Honest Stan's so greedy he seized the boat when the fellow left. If he hadn't done that, no one would have sussed he'd been involved. Can you imagine it: a banker investing in gun running? It could only happen here. You find a professional man here who's an Englishman or an American, and nine times out of ten he's crooked, incompetent, or queer. The quacks are an example of incompetence. They're only capable of looking up your arse to see if your hat's on straight.'

Having my ration of gossip for the night, I went home and read. Two hours later, as I was finishing an American news magazine, I read a review of a book about the selection and training of American business executives. A phrase of the reviewer's intrigued me: '... proving that only white, Anglo-Saxon protestants, or wasps, ...'

How American, I thought, to seek, sometimes wittily, sometimes insipidly, abbreviations or nicknames for nouns or phrases. The word snafu is now dignified by inclusion in the Oxford English Dictionary, while limeys and canucks are accepted

widely as Englishmen and Canadians respectively. Now we had wasps for white, Anglo-Saxon protestants . . . Wasps!

I rolled out of bed, ran to Sandra's room, and pounded on the door. Seconds later, I heard her sleepily ask who it was.

'Get up!' I shouted. 'This is important.'

'Wait a moment.'

I did not even joke about her having to unlock the door.

'Couldn't it wait until tomorrow?' she asked, obviously still angry about my remarks made in the morning.

'Come outside. I want to show you the moon.'

Sulkily, she followed me downstairs and out into the garden, where the dogs bounded up and circled us curiously.

'Do you remember that intercept addressed to Mike?' I asked. 'It had a paragraph about how difficult it was to get cucumbers.'

'Have you been drinking?'

I lost my temper. 'Answer my question!'

'I remember it.'

'It's addressed to Mike, who is Lesnick, and goes: "... the only catch is getting cukes. In our garden, they are not ripe yet, and there are still too many wasps about. In a couple of months, it should be all right when there are fewer wasps." Right?'

She was interested now. 'Yes.'

'I decided in London that cukes meant nukes, which is an American slang abbreviation for nuclear weapons. That's what I kept back from Harvey and Grant. Your uncle thought wasps were counter intelligence men, and I agreed. But I found out tonight it may mean white, Anglo-Saxon protestants: W. A. S. P. - more American slang.

'So reread the intercept. The Russians may plan to set off a nuclear weapon when they infiltrate the base with a non-wasp, or traitor. Don't expect a negro or Chinese catholic, just a traitor. And, don't forget, Harvey confirmed my suspicions about the threat of a nuclear explosion. You're seeing Gomez tomorrow. Get him cracking on it. Point out that Lesnick's no longer aboard the contrabander, but selling booze on those American bases. Where's Lesnick's brother in the American Air Force? He's no

wasp; he's Ukrainian to start with. Have you got all this?'

She was staring at me. 'Good God, yes!'

'Well, let's get back to bed. When you brief Gomez, emphasize there's a time limit in that intercept of a couple of months. It's up now.'

Chapter 13

Before lunch the following day, Sandra reported on her interview with Gomez. Unaware of the threat of the nuclear explosion, he had sat in stunned amazement, cursing Harvey and me for not having warned him. He promised his cooperation in urging Harvey and Grant to send more surveillance teams to Tangier and to obtain from the F. B. I. and R. C. M. P. the information I sought. In fact, he planned to go to Gibraltar on the evening flight to reinforce my requests.

He had angrily admitted to her he had no information: nothing from the F. B. I. or R. C. M. P. to connect Johnson with stolen securities or counterfeit money; nor any evaluation reports on the surveillance teams. He agreed with my appraisal that we were not being properly supported because of inertia or niggardliness in London, but felt my interpretation of the two-month deadline should gain us top priority. If he failed to impress Harvey, he proposed to appeal directly to London.

'What about tracing 13566?' I asked.

'No luck,' she replied. 'He's never been successful getting unlisted numbers from the telephone company.'

'Damn. We'll have to try blasting. Leave a message in Rayburn's box for him to phone the number tomorrow night at 11 o'clock. Since the number of the American Club is 13565, he can use it as cover for the call. If he gets a man, he's to speak English and prolong the conversation. He'll tape it, and we may be able to identify the voice.'

She looked at me expectantly, then asked: 'How?'

'Let me think . . . Yes, this'll do. The next day Cox goes to the bank to see Johnson. He wants to borrow money to buy

aqualungs for underwater fishing and exploration. They do charter work, so it's not too strange. Prolong and tape that conversation as well. If after comparison, they think the result is positive, send us the tapes. O.K.?'

She shrugged. 'I see what you mean by blasting. And if it doesn't work?'

'Then I'll have to get off my butt and break into Johnson's flat. I'll probably have to anyway, but I want to postpone it until I've some proof he's the resident.'

She left me, and I racked my brains unsuccessfully for a means of initiating action and of dominating the intrigue. But I had no leads except the telephone number, which might prove that of Lesnick's mistress. Given a positive lead to the location of the file room, I could break in and conclude the assignment. All I had done was conjure up the spectre of an imminent nuclear explosion and gather gossip that indicated Johnson was a crook and womanizer.

Two days later, Sandra came back from the city with the tapes obtained by Rayburn and Cox, who thought the comparison positive. While playing them, we heard certain similarities that the London philologists should comment on, though the voice reproduction was not high fidelity. Sandra also quoted Gomez as saying that Harvey and Grant were impressed by my interpretation of the intercept and promised full and immediate support. Already, more men were shadowing Johnson, Ser-rano, and Lesnick, and Strauss's reception was organized, for the Royal Navy had reported his imminent return to Tangier.

Gomez had also said both the F. B. I. and R. C. M. P. believed stolen securities and counterfeit American traveller's cheques were being trafficked in by Tangier banks. Although the R. C. M. P. had not identified the banks, the F. B. I. had quoted Interpol, the international police clearing house, as stating categorically that the Moroccan police believed six months ago the Bank of Wall Street Foreign was the main outlet. Now, the

Moroccan police hedged in their identification, perhaps indicating bribery by Johnson, though neither Interpol nor the F. B. I. would comment on this. The value of the stolen securities traced back to Tangier during the past year had approached \$1,000,000 and that of the bogus traveller's cheques about \$200,000.

According to Gomez, another branch of British intelligence had recently reported that the several American banks whose traveller's cheques had been counterfeited had each hired private investigators. A British agent working independently of Gomez had been employed by one of these investigators, but his report was heretofore ignored by London since British security was not involved. After six months' investigation, these agencies had reported independently their suspicions that Johnson's bank was the main clearing house for outlets in Beirut and Geneva, as well as other Tangier banks. Their report had not led to action by the Tangier police, but had panicked someone, for the traffic in both securities and traveller's cheques had petered out two months ago.

After complaints at diplomatic levels, several Tangier police officers had been replaced, but the new ones said they were occupied by a more recent bank fraud involving \$1,600,000. They argued that they had definite evidence of fraud in the latter case and felt Johnson's bank might have been the innocent victim of an international gang. None of the private agencies nor the British agent concurred, Gomez reported.

Meanwhile, another sub-plot approached fruition. Sandra and I were invited to tea that afternoon by our lesbian neighbours. When we arrived, I could not suppress a smile, for the other guest was Jane Johnson. One of our hostesses, Joan – the butch, or diesel, dike of the ménage – was a lean, flat American blonde, while the other, Merle, the feminine partner, was a plump, common woman from South Africa.

After we were introduced, Merle resumed pouring tea. When it was my turn, she asked:

'How do you like it, love?'

'Anyhow and everywhere,' I leered. 'But I'd prefer gin, if you're talking about tea.'

This vulgarity reduced Merle and Jane to giggles, though Sandra and Joan were unmoved. Then Joan drawled:

'That's what I like to hear. I'll join you.'

Affecting to understand this as an invitation, I followed her to the kitchen. While she poured two hefty gins, I used my miniature camera to photograph her face in profile.

'Easy with the gin, dear,' I cautioned, patting her lightly on the rump.

She recoiled, but managed to ask: 'Tonic?'

'Thanks, fill it up.'

Back with the others, I steered the conversation towards furniture and praised the Moorish decor of the house. Eventually, Joan proved feminine enough to invite Sandra and me to tour the premises, Merle and Jane remaining in the salon. I tagged along, moving from one room to another well behind the two women. As I had expected, Joan kept far from me and usually manoeuvred Sandra between us. When we reached a bedroom, obviously used by the two hostesses, I encouraged an even speedier flight by patting Joan again on the rump.

With Sandra blocking the doorway, I slipped a bug hidden in an empty compact under the carpet between the heads of the two beds. I also photographed the upper half of one bed. Back in the salon, I had another drink, photographed Jane, and made a nuisance of myself by asking to see the erotica. With the atmosphere well chilled, I said Sandra and I had to return to work. Jane was obviously staying, and no one objected to my departure, though they tried to dissuade Sandra from leaving.

On our way back, Sandra snapped: 'I don't know what you were up to, but you're not welcome back there.'

'Couldn't care less. My mission should be accomplished shortly.'

'What filthy tricks . . . ?'

I shook my head. 'Don't bother your pretty head.'

In the house, I went to my room and stripped down to bathing

suit and shirt and tugged a floppy hat over my head. Picking up a book and transistor radio with ear plugs, I went to the garden and sprawled on the ground. I turned the set to the frequency of the bug in the lesbians' bedroom and hooked up the ear plugs. If Jane Johnson were cheating on Honest Stan, she would have to perform in the afternoon, for he required her presence at nightly gatherings, where he considered himself one of Tangier's social lions.

Within minutes, I heard identifiable voices over the set and listened long enough to confirm my suspicions. I turned off the set and returned to the house. Unfortunately, I had to retrieve the bug, but I had just examined the lesbians' house and garden and noted as well the absence of dogs. Also to my advantage were the floors and stairs, not of creaking wood but tiled. From what Sandra and I had learned of the lesbians' habits, they went out nightly, usually returning at midnight, after which their servants went to a nearby Arab community.

Sandra and I rarely spoke during dinner and later settled down in the salon with books. When our servants left, I went to my room and brought a packet downstairs. Opening it, I removed and put on a pair of rubber gloves. Then I wiped my fingerprints off several objects: a plastic spectacle-frame, from which the lenses had been removed; a plastic disc, about four inches in diameter; and a small lead ball, a fishing weight.

Cutting a length of wide adhesive tape, I pierced it in the centre and threaded a two-foot length of string through the hole until a knot at the end was caught in it. I stuck the tape lightly to the disc and trimmed it to conform to the disc. Then I knotted a two-foot length of cord to the lead weight. I put these two objects in the pockets of a black *jellaba*, an Arab hooded garment cut like a nightshirt to one's ankles. This and the spectacle-frame I placed on a table near the terrace door and, peeling off the gloves, added them to the heap.

I then went outside, carrying a pair of rubber bathing sandals. Putting them on the terrace, I went to the gardener's shed and completed my preparations there after two more trips to fetch

objects from the house. I returned to the salon and grinned at Sandra. 'All set.'

It failed to break the ice. While I had worked inside, she had looked at me curiously from time to time, but had said nothing.

'What's all set?' she snapped.

'Come into the garden.' When we were outside, I said: 'I bugged the lessies' bedroom and I'm going for the bug after they're asleep. When I'm ready to go, I'll wake you. I need your help, but I'll tell you about it then.'

'Is that all?' she asked angrily.

'Yes. And don't lock your door.'

She glared at me and swept into the house and upstairs. I shut the doors and went to my bedroom, where I dozed off.

My vigil began at eleven o'clock from our upstairs terrace, which afforded me side and front views of the adjacent house. Since the bug had a ten-hour life that ended at four in the morning, I had the receiver with me. Shortly before midnight, I saw the lesbians enter the house. Within minutes, the two servants left, and the exterior lights went out. At one o'clock, Joan and Merle entered the bedroom and while undressing, gossiped and drank. In bed, they read and occasionally talked until Merle fell asleep. By two o'clock the set was silent.

Waking Sandra, I told her to go out in the garden and listen to the set. Back in my bedroom, I took off my wrist watch so that its phosphorescent dial would not reveal me. Stripping, I applied dark vegetable stain to my face, ankles, and arms, then dressed in a singlet, shorts, and brown tennis shoes.

When I joined Sandra, she told me the set was still silent. With the dogs following, I went to the shed and in two trips carried to the wall two kitchen step-up stools, one having a length of rope attached, and a short, wide wooden plank with a heavy Arab blanket nailed to one side. The area of the wall I had chosen was rocky at the foot of each side, but quite level. Putting a stool against the wall, I climbed up and examined the adjacent house, then placed the plank over the glass shards, the blanket falling down the other side. After another ascent, I

lowered over the wall by rope the second stool, the blanket muffling any scraping sounds.

Returning to Sandra, I led her to the wall and showed her how everything could be retrieved quickly. If my plan went awry, I advised her to throw the plank and blanket over the cliff into the sea, where they would be swept away by the tidal stream. The dogs, I told her, would be locked in the downstairs bathroom with food, since I had found in two tests they stayed there for fifteen minutes before barking.

'If the lessies wake up,' I said, 'you can warn me by this other set. I'll wear those glasses with the built-in receiver. Well, if you haven't any questions, I'm off like a big-assed bird.'

'You're not going dressed like that?' she asked.

'No, I've got a *jellaba*, but I can't put it on until the dogs are locked up. They go for anybody wearing one. O.K?'

'Yes. Good luck.'

Leashing the two dogs, I led them to the bathroom and shut them inside. I pulled the *jellaba* over my head and put on the rubber gloves and receiver glasses. Then I ran outside towards the stool, blowing a kiss at Sandra. Climbing up, I peered over, then scrambled on to the plank and lowered myself slowly on to the other stool. It did not shift under my weight, and I jumped to the ground.

In seconds I was at the glass terrace door, listening for a full minute while my nerves steadied. Then removing the plastic disc from my pocket, I peeled off the adhesive tape, affixing it to the door near the lock. I held the attached string in my left hand and took the lead weight from my pocket with my right.

Spinning it as swiftly as possible, I adjusted its motion so that the lead would strike the centre of the adhesive patch. Then I moved it slowly closer, checking the steadiness of my wrist. The arc was a trifle high, so I withdrew the spinning lead and started again. The second time it was low. But on the fourth try, the alignment was perfect.

The lead hit the patch. The glass shattered sharply in the pattern of a rough circle. I pulled the string holding the patch,

to which most of the broken glass had adhered. Shoving both lead and patch into my pockets, I stooped to listen at the hole for another minute, then pulled the hood of the *jellaba* over my head.

The hole was slightly larger than my hand, and I reached in to unlatch the door. I left it wide and went quickly to the front door, which I opened a foot. After pausing at the bottom of the stairs, I started up. The bedroom door was open, and I stopped when my eyes were level with the floor and listened.

Completing the ascent, I moved an ottoman so that it stood in the doorway. I stepped over it and froze when one of the women turned in bed. When she was still again, I went swiftly between the beds and bent down. I had my fingers on the compact just as the woman to my right screamed. It was Merle.

Pocketing the compact, I swung right, put both hands under the bed, and overturned it. She fell to the floor with the bed on top of her, screaming in terror. I whirled and ran to the door.

'You son-of-a-bitch!' shouted Joan above Merle's screams. 'I'll fix you!'

As I vaulted the ottoman and started down the stairs, two shots blasted out. By the time I was downstairs, she was yelling in pursuit. She tripped over the ottoman and crashed to the floor, firing another bullet and cursing. I slammed the front door and ran through the terrace door into the garden. Within seconds, I was over the wall, hauling up the other stool, which I threw to Sandra, and dropping the plank and blanket behind me. Before I jumped down, I looked back. Lights shone downstairs, and Merle still screamed.

'Take the stools to the kitchen and put the rope in the gardener's shack,' I said to Sandra, then ran to the cliff end of the garden.

Peeling off the *jellaba*, I threw it over the wall, followed by the plank, the now unattached blanket, the lead weight, the disc, the adhesive patch, and, finally, my singlet, shorts, shoes, and gloves. Naked, I ran to the terrace and slipped on the bathing

shoes. Once inside, I shoed the unleashed dogs into the garden, where they ran about snarling and barking.

Sauntering into the unlighted kitchen, I drawled to Sandra: 'Bit of a rum do, that.'

'My God!' she gasped, 'you're naked.'

'As a new-born babe and twice as cocky! For Christ's sake, give me a cigarette and a drink!'

She giggled and threw me her *peignoir*, which I let fall to the floor.

'Wrap yourself up,' she said. 'There are cigarettes and a lighter in the pocket.'

'To hell with modesty. Anyway, I can't fashion a G-string with this stain on my arms.'

She was rattling bottles in a cupboard. 'What do you want to drink?'

'Anything, as long as it's strong and straight.'

'Did you get it?'

'Sure,' I replied, tossing the compact on the table. 'You take care of it.'

She poured liquid into a glass and put it on the table between us. I threw it back and said:

'Pour another and light a cigarette. I can't touch your clothes.'

She lit a cigarette and placed it on the side of the table with another drink. When I picked them up, she edged around the table, keeping its width between us.

'What the hell's the matter?' I asked. 'Are you scared of me?'

'You're bad enough dressed. What happened over there?'

'That god damned diesel dike!' I snapped. 'I should've known she'd have a pistol in her bedside table.'

Sandra laughed. 'How close were the bullets?'

'No idea. I think I outran them. Look, we've got to be in bed if the cops come. They should be another five minutes.'

'Do you do this sort of thing often?'

'Not for years. I'll have to do some soon and wanted to practise with the lessies. Come on, let's go.'

I followed her upstairs and went to my bathroom, where I

scrubbed off the stain. Switching on the light, I examined myself, the shoes, the brush, and the sink, then went to bed.

Some ten minutes later, the police arrived and politely asked us what we knew of the burglary next door. They were aware of the dogs' reputation and said the burglar had obviously not used our garden in his approach to or flight from the plundered house. When I inquired into what had been stolen, the police said the wealthy American woman had lost three fur coats and several thousand dollars worth of jewels.

I shook my head sadly. 'I hope she was insured.'

'Fortunately, yes,' said one of the three policemen.

'Anyone injured in the shooting?' I asked.

'What shooting!' barked the three policemen simultaneously.

'I heard three explosions and a woman screaming, but paid no attention because they get quite noisy over there. At the time, I thought they were having a party with fireworks, but I guess it must have been shots. Didn't you hear them, dear?'

When Sandra supported me, two policemen rushed back to the scene of the burglary, while the third swiftly took our names and those of our parents. When he left, we started upstairs.

'It's a caution,' I grinned. 'The dishonesty of some people.'

Sandra looked at me sourly. 'Why did you mention the shots?'

'The cops hadn't; so presumably the diesel dike wished to conceal her ownership of a pistol. The law takes a dim view of it hereabouts, what with the instability of the natives, etcetera. Well, good night, dear.'

She burst out laughing and went to her room.

The next day, I gave Gomez the film I had used in the lesbians' house and advised him on making up the montage with shots of the bed, Joan, and Jane.

'Where do they get the original scene,' he asked, 'on which to superimpose your shots? I don't suppose London keeps this sort of thing on file.'

I snorted: 'Hell, with the weirdies they have at H. Q., they're bound to have a few pornographers. If not, try Soho or Paris.'

I left him, picked up Sandra, who had been shopping, and went to the Bank of Wall Street Foreign. I had phoned Honest Stan earlier, and we were immediately taken into his office. The unpretentious decor surprised me until I reflected that he gulled most of his clients by advertising and by mail. Unlike most bankers, he did not have to impress anyone locally; Tangier's residents had sized him up and dealt with stabler banks.

I introduced him to Sandra and noted a lecherous gleam in his eyes. Had he not reacted in this fashion, he would have been out of character for she was glamorously turned out.

'I hope Robert doesn't keep your nose to the grindstone, Miss Grant,' he burbled. 'You're too pretty to be slaving over his scripts.'

'He's such a stern boss, Mr. Johnson . . . ' she started, but he interrupted her, an expression of mock horror on his face and his hands held in front of his chest as though to ward off a blow.

'Please, please, Miss Grant. Everyone calls me Stan.'

'And you must call me Sandra,' she purred, then turned to me. 'Robert, I think this is the friendliest bank I've ever been in, and Stan the pleasantest banker I've met. The others were stern old men.'

I stole a glance at Honest Stan, but these extravagances had not repelled him. Indeed, he beamed happily.

'We do our best, Sandra,' he said.

'I started to say Robert's such a stern boss,' she said, 'I was scared to call him by his first name until two weeks ago. He's kept me so busy I've just about finished the script and have to go home next week.'

'We can't have that,' smiled Johnson. 'All work and no play is not right for Tangier. I can give you a job here, and you won't have to work more than a couple of hours a day.'

'How divine!' she cooed. 'Would you really?'

'A pleasure. And I think you'd have a lot of fun too.'

I cut in with: 'I'm afraid we haven't got much time, Stan. So give me a run-down on the tax angles.'

After a scowl at me and what he thought was a smile laden

with promise for Sandra, he quickly summed up the tax dodges he claimed to have devised for me. I had heard them all before and, in fact, practised several, but did not comment, limiting myself to some sage grunts and nods. Half-way through his delivery, the telephone rang. He spoke over it briefly, then hung up, saying proudly:

‘Do you know who that was?’

‘No,’ I said.

‘Jim Wilmot, a really sharp Australian, who’s doing business through us.’

Although I had ample evidence of his venality, I marvelled at a banker’s revealing to a relative stranger his association with a notorious con man.

Returning to my tax problems, he wound up his presentation by asking my opinions. I hedged, praising his grasp of the situation and promising an early decision.

Apparently pleased, he said: ‘Why don’t you and Sandra come to the flat tonight for drinks?’

‘Well . . .’ I started, but Sandra had chimed in with:

‘Please, Robert. I haven’t been in town at night since I’ve been here. It would be such fun. If I work very hard tomorrow morning, I’ll be caught up.’

‘Come now, Robert,’ said Johnson. ‘You can’t disappoint the little lady.’

‘All right, you’re on,’ I said.

We said good-bye, Sandra lingering longer with a handshake than I thought necessary. On the street, I said:

‘Real creep, eh?’

‘I don’t know,’ she replied slowly. ‘I thought he had a certain charm.’

‘For Christ’s sake!’ I exploded, ‘he’s a bloody . . .’

She laughed gaily. ‘Jealous, master-mind?’

I stopped walking to glare at her, then laughed. She tucked her hand under my arm, and we walked on. If only this damned assignment were finished, I thought . . .

We had drinks at a terrace bar, and I told her to get a message to Rayburn. At exactly 10.15 that night, he was to dial 13566 and hang up after the phone rang thrice. If anyone answered, he was not to speak. If the line were busy, he was to try again at 10.25.

Sandra and I arrived at Honest Stan's at ten o'clock, were introduced to several other guests, and offered champagne and caviar.

'Just a little celebration in your honour,' he said, 'and to our association.'

While he uttered this nonsense, he had looked only at Sandra. His wife scowled, but said nothing. I prowled about the salon and its expensive furnishings. One telephone was visible on a desk, but it carried the number listed in Johnson's name. At 10.15, when a buzzer sounded, Honest Stan left the room. He came back shortly and took me out on to the terrace. After some preliminary comments about the view of the port and bay, he said:

'Beautiful girl, Sandra.'

I shrugged. 'She's attractive, but I never mix business with pleasure.'

It was the reply he had sought, and he was so pleased he clapped me on the back, urging more champagne and caviar on me. After an hour, Sandra and I left, stopping at a bar to confirm by telephone that Rayburn had made the call and that it had been unanswered.

The next night, I arranged through Rayburn to have Johnson tailed and his movements reported to me. At ten o'clock, he joined a group in the Madison and apparently planned to stay some hours. I told Rayburn to watch the front of Johnson's apartment building and keep in radio contact with me while I broke into the flat. After getting no answer on the flat's telephone, I went there and took the elevator to the top floor.

I walked down two flights to Johnson's floor and rang the bell. It chimed several bars of a popular song, but no one came; nor

did anyone answer my knocks. At the servants' entrance, I rang the bell and also knocked with no response.

Contacting Rayburn, I told him I was going in. I put on rubber gloves and examined the lock. It was a well-made standard model, but it was not double-locked. When I slipped a strip of stiff plastic between the door and frame, the door opened. Inside, I checked the flat quickly to see if anyone were hiding or sleeping, then went to the salon.

I traced the telephone wire there back to a ventilation shaft off the servants' bathroom and found another telephone lead. I followed it to a room furnished as a study, the lead going under a carpet to a desk and disappearing into a drawer. In the unlocked drawer was a telephone labelled 13566.

Picking up the receiver, I dialled the yacht. Cox, who had been standing by, answered. I said, 'O.K.', and hung up. Within seconds the telephone rang. It was Cox. We immediately hung up, having confirmed, perhaps unnecessarily, that the telephone's number was actually 13566. When the telephone had rung, a buzzer started somewhere in the flat, which was stilled when I picked up the receiver.

With one exception, the desk drawers were unlocked, but contained nothing of interest to me. The exception had such a flimsy lock that I picked it easily with an instrument I carried resembling a bent nail. The drawer held only a small notebook listing the names and telephone numbers of fourteen women. I copied them on a piece of paper, then relocked the drawer.

I left the flat by the rear door, walked up two flights, and rode down to the street level in the elevator, after which I went home. All I had proved was that 13566 was the number of an unlisted telephone in Johnson's flat. Lesnick, who had provided the original lead, might be having an affair with Jane Johnson, though I doubted it.

The following day, I conferred with Gomez about the list of fourteen women and on the advisability of tapping Johnson's unlisted telephone. I was against tapping it, and Gomez

concurred, for we both knew how easily electronic devices revealed bugs. If he were the resident, Honest Stan would check his flat and telephones regularly with such detection equipment.

On my arrival in his office, I knew from Gomez's attitude he had information for me, though he chose to let me lead off. Finally, he told me Strauss had docked his contrabander early in the morning and been shadowed when he went ashore to a bar. Using a beam, the surveillance team had caught the clicks of the number he dialled. It was 13566.

From overhearing Strauss's side of the conversation, the shadowers gathered he had been told to call another number later. Strauss had not repeated the number, but had written it on the wall beside the telephone, later asking the barman for paper so that he could transcribe it. After he left, two of our men entered the bar, claiming they were employees of the telephone company on a routine check. While pretending to service the telephone, they had copied down seventeen numbers that were written on the wall. These numbers were now being investigated.

'Could be where he keeps the files,' I said.

Gomez nodded. 'It's another nail in Johnson's coffin.'

He went on to tell me he had received a report on Lesnick's brother. According to the R. C. M. P., Serge Lesnick had fought for the Loyalists during the Spanish Civil War and suffered severe facial wounds, returning to Canada in 1938. Although he was unemployed and his family poor, Serge had lived with them for a year in Toronto, undergoing plastic surgery before disappearing into the United States. The R. C. M. P. had run routine but unproductive checks on him, for they thought he was a communist agent.

After his disappearance, he had written his parents that he had joined the United States Army Air Corps in Texas but neglected to give his address. It was the last word they had ever received from him. The R. C. M. P. had forwarded pictures and a physical description, but cautioned that his appearance had undoubtedly changed under plastic surgery. No finger-prints were

available. The F. B. I., however, could find no trace of him in the American Air Force nor in any other service.

'A prime wasp,' I commented, looking at photographs of a disfigured man who bore some resemblance about the eyes to Joe Lesnick. 'Has Grant warned the Yanks?'

'No.'

'Why the hell not?' I barked.

'Presumably he has good reasons,' he replied stiffly.

'Balls! He's playing with fire again, trying to prove we're more competent than the American I. S. on their own ground. He's a bloody fool!'

Gomez said nothing, so I returned to the villa and later invited Johnson and his wife for dinner that night. Relaxing with a newspaper, I noted the date was November 2 and that the world was smouldering in two areas. The British government vacillated over whether or not to authorize the landing of the Anglo-French forces to seize the Suez canal. From Hungary, President Imre Nagy had appealed the previous day to the United Nations for support in his battle – verbal so far – against Soviet domination of his country. I determined to sound out Johnson on these developments.

Over dinner, I steered the conversation accordingly and almost gaped as Johnson gave his opinions in tones of sincerity. He knew Arabs, he said, and predicted they would so mismanage the Suez canal that Britain's lifeline to the Orient would be cut. Nasser must go, he continued, and the invasion forces should land immediately to accomplish this end. As for Hungary, he favoured Nagy's national communism, arguing it would break further the solid front of European communism, first breached by Tito. Strange sentiments, indeed, for a man I was convinced was a Russian resident.

I still had to determine his link with me in Montreal in 1936. We had discussed the city before, but he had never volunteered any details of where he had lived. Later, in the salon as we had coffee and liqueurs, I asked him flatly where his home was in Montreal.

'At the corner of Valdivia and Stewart streets,' he replied. 'But I haven't been there for years.'

It was like being stunned by a club. I also had a sickening feeling in my stomach as though I had been hit there as well. I spilt some of my liqueur, but he was looking at Sandra. Somehow I got a grip on myself and mustered enough control to say evenly:

'Don't know it. We lived in Westmount.'

As the conversation drifted into other channels, my thoughts went back to the residents of the four houses at that intersection in 1936. Then I had the answer. Without any possible doubt, Johnson was the resident and a Russian-born national.

They left soon, and I went to bed. Early in the morning, I was at the airport and found a vacant seat on the flight to Gibraltar. There, I went to Harvey's office and as soon as I was seated said:

'I know who Johnson is. But to prove it I want the Montreal City Directory for 1936, or especially the pages showing the residents living at the intersection of Stewart and Valdivia streets. You probably don't have such a directory in British cities, but . . .'

I trailed off, for he had opened a file, found a paper, and handed it to me, saying:

'Is this what you want?'

I looked at it and snapped: 'You rotten bunch of bastards!'

Chapter 14

What I held was a photostatic copy of a page from the directory, showing the residents of Stewart street, where it met Valdivia. In one house was the Jonaitis family, among whom was a Stanley, listed as a linotype operator with the Montreal News. Next door, the Belcourt family included a Robert, extravagantly termed a reporter with the same newspaper.

'Why the hell couldn't you tell me?' I said angrily.

'We were sure the resident was Johnson, but we wanted you to prove it without preconceived ideas. Grant thinks highly of your blasting ability and wanted you to tie it up on your own. You did it before you tumbled to this. Is Johnson the Stanley Jonaitis you knew?'

'He doesn't even bear a faint resemblance. Where is Stanley?'

'Dead probably. The family went back to Lithuania in 1938 and disappeared when the Russians occupied the country. In 1940, a Stanley Jonaitis changed his name legally in Montreal to Stanley Johnson and in '41 joined the Canadian army. How well did you know him?'

'Quite well, despite the five-year difference in our ages. He was an apprentice in the newspaper's mechanical department and tipped me off when there was a vacancy for a copy boy. You got the connection between us from the directory?'

He nodded. 'On joining the army, he gave that address, though he wasn't living there. The Mounties tried to trace everyone who lived nearby. They tracked you down and suggested we contact you because you lived in the U. K. Why didn't you tumble earlier?'

I lit a cigarette, then replied: 'I'd forgotten that Jonaitis was

Johnson in English. It was only last night that I pinned him down to that intersection. Then I puzzled over which family he came from and finally saw how the Lithuanian angle fitted.'

'How are you going to wrap it up?'

'We'll have to find his files, and it's possible Sandra Grant can help. Johnson must have a quiet place where he takes his girl-friends. Perhaps it's where he keeps the files.'

Harvey's face was expressionless. 'She goes to bed with him?'

'Hell no! She'll be part of the squeeze play. I don't think he's much of a Russian intelligence officer now, but it would help to know when he was last under their direct control. If he were behind the curtain recently, he's such a chameleon he may be more of a resident than I think. Do you know anything about it?'

Harvey told me Johnson's passport had been photographed on a recent visit to Gibraltar. He had visited Austria two years ago for three weeks and may have slipped across the border into Czechoslovakia or Hungary, using a faked passport. During the three and a half years he had travelled with his current Canadian passport he had no other opportunity to go behind the curtain.

Russian practice requires a senior agent to return periodically to the Soviet Union for further indoctrination and training in new intelligence methods. The frequency of these visits depends primarily on whether the agent is indispensable in his post or whether his work has become negligent or suspect. Nostalgia or family ties might also dictate a recall if an agent's efficiency were affected.

But would these factors apply to Johnson? The Russians undoubtedly considered him a proved and trusted agent of at least 16 years' foreign experience, during which he had survived several purges, especially the violent one following Beria's death. With such a veteran, they might relax their rules and not require his frequent recall. Even if they had spotted his bourgeois defects, they were obviously satisfied with his past performance in promoting him to run the network based on Tangier, to associate him with a nuclear explosion, and to charge him with running

guns to the Algerians. They favoured results over theories, and Johnson had delivered for many years.

Harvey and I believed his intelligence activities followed from the conditioned reflexes of an old pro and not from the dedication of a zealot. The Russian I. S. is good, but the aura of superiority and omniscience credited them is not justified, for they have blundered often in their use of senior agents. We felt they had erred in Johnson's case and that he was a potential defector. Adaptable to the western world, he had blended too well into the non-communist background since his last probable re-indoctrination.

Back in Tangier for lunch, I conferred later with Gomez. Strauss had lost his shadowers, Gomez told me, on his way to his rendezvous the previous evening with Johnson, shortly before the latter dined with me. Prior to setting out from a bar, Strauss had dialled 42833, an unlisted number among the seventeen found on the wall beside the telephone Strauss had used earlier in the day.

As taped through a beam, he had said in Spanish:

'Let me speak to René. It's Jacques.'

After a pause, he continued in English:

'René?'

'O.K to come over now?'

'Repeat it, will you?'

'Right away.'

When Gomez turned off the tape recorder, I covered my face with both hands, moaning:

'Christ, if they'd stuck to him, we'd be finished. What a lousy break! You caught that René bit - obviously René of the intercept.'

Strauss had probably left his taxi, Gomez said, when it slowed to turn at an intersection, momentarily out of sight of our men. They had established the intersection, for one pair of the shadowers had driven ahead of and the other behind Strauss, who had apparently disappeared into a partially walled vacant lot. Such a dodge would be routine to a man of Strauss's experi-

ence and did not necessarily reflect his awareness of our surveillance. Gomez said the intersection was within a hundred yards of two flats frequently visited by Serrano. Both were now under surveillance.

The list of fourteen women I had found in Johnson's flat had produced no leads, Gomez explaining that most were apparently tourists who had left Tangier. Those still living in the city were mainly attractive, single women who might appreciate Johnson's attentions or ones he considered amenable to cultivation.

Gomez then produced the montage of Jane Johnson and Joan in the latter's bedroom. We agreed it should stimulate Johnson, and at my dictation he wrote in Spanish: 'IN THIS CASE YOU ARE NOT THE LAST TO KNOW - A FRIEND.' He sealed the note and photograph in an envelope, addressed to Johnson personally at his bank.

Returning to the villa, I brought Sandra up to date and told her she would move to a *pension* the following day.

'The next day,' I continued, 'get in touch with Johnson about that job he offered. Encourage him to take you out. It shouldn't be difficult in the state he'll be in.'

'Do I go to bed with him the first night?' she snapped.

'No, you don't go to bed with him at all.'

'What role are you playing now? Master-mind again or something more human?'

I shrugged, looking at her steadily. 'Figure it out for yourself. You're to lead him on.'

'If I have to be bitchy, tell me more. Where do I lead him? To the edge of the bed?'

'To the bedroom door!' I barked. 'That'll do!'

Her face softened. 'Sorry, Robert, this is a new role.'

'Me too, doll.'

She smiled. 'How do we keep in touch?'

'I'll phone you, and we'll have coffee in the afternoons.'

'I'll be too busy at night?'

I said nothing. Suddenly, she stepped forward, twined her

arms around my neck, and pulled my head down to hers. She kissed me soundly, stamped one foot across my sandalled toes, and pushed me away.

I yelped, then said: 'That's a helluva peculiar response.'

She laughed. 'It's the way I feel about you, you handsome bastard!'

That night at 2 a.m., I was awakened by Sam Wright on the telephone. After identifying himself, he said:

'You got any newspaper connections in London, Robert?'

'Yes, but I don't do any work for them nowadays. What's up?'

'I've got a great story, and I want to flog it quickly before the stringers here are on to it. Can I trust you?'

'You've got to. What is it?'

'A contraband boat was just blown up. It belonged to a German called Strauss.'

I was wide awake. 'Jesus! How?'

'There's a French destroyer alongside, about three hundred yards away. They probably used frog-men because the charge was under the hull. One guy killed.'

'Who?'

'An Englishman - the cook.'

'Not the guy I was at sea with?'

'Yeah, I'd forgotten you'd know him.'

I cursed Harvey inaudibly for not getting Cookie off the boat. 'Poor bastard! Why did the French do it?'

'Strauss was probably running guns to Algeria. Well, what do I do?'

I advised him on details a newspaper required, telling him I would join him in his bar. On the way there, I stopped the taxi at a point from which I could examine the port through binoculars. A destroyer was alongside, searchlights playing on her French name. Arc-lights on the yacht quay showed a crowd, many of them uniformed police, a diving pump in operation, and wreckage in the water.

When I arrived, Sam was questioning two members of

Strauss's crew, who said they had all been sleeping ashore except Cookie and a watchman. The latter witnessed the explosion from the quay and was quoted as saying the craft broke in half and sank within seconds. The charge, probably of the limpet variety, had apparently been affixed to the hull under the engine room, for shattered bits of the diesel engines had been strewn over the quay. This seemed to prove that bottled cooking gas, the only potential explosive normally found aboard, could not have been responsible. The crew members assured us that spare gas bottles were on deck and that the one in the galley was at the same level.

The vessel had loaded five hundred cases of cigarettes, valued at \$22,500, the previous afternoon for her departure tonight to Sicily. The loss of this cargo, half-owned by Strauss, had reduced him to incoherence when he arrived on the quay. First, he had shaken his fist at the French destroyer and shouted in German, according to Sam who had been present. When he had calmed down, he told police he was a victim of a vendetta by less successful but unidentified smugglers.

I called a friend, a senior editor on a London newspaper, then handed the telephone to Sam. Half an hour later, I was back in bed wondering how the French had uncovered Strauss's arms smuggling. But such conjecture was ridiculous, for the French I. S. blanketed Morocco with agents and informers.

Although many persons may look upon the French as irresolute and unreliable, these characteristics do not apply to their rugged and merciless I. S. Where the Americans and British might gather evidence against gun-runners, the French would act outside the law if they felt the demonstration salutary. Tonight's reaction was typical: a violent lesson to any contrabanders who might consider assisting the Algerian rebels. What surprised me was that they had not dealt personally with Strauss.

That afternoon, before Sandra moved to a *pension*, we heard news broadcasts about the arrival in Budapest of Russian troops to suppress the revolution. Also featured was the inept handling of the Suez invasion forces by the British government. I told

Sandra to comment on these items to Johnson and then to concentrate on Cookie's savage death.

Finally, three days later she reported positive results in our campaign. She had been unable to contact Johnson for twenty-four hours, since he was unavailable at both his flat and office. His shadowers said he had arrived at the bank the morning of Cookie's death and immediately returned home, presumably after reading his mail. His wife fled hysterically from the flat an hour later and, despite heavy make-up and dark glasses, had obviously been pummelled about the eyes and face. She had gone without luggage to my neighbours and remained there.

From inquiries, we learned Johnson had stormed in to his flat and knocked his wife senseless. The servants had probably restrained him from killing her, or so they claimed. Then Johnson had overturned furniture and smashed breakable objects. The grand piano, particularly favoured by his wife, had been reduced almost to kindling. Unable to destroy the piano stool, he had heaved it through a window into the yard below. Somewhat pacified by the destruction, he had then drunk himself into a stupor.

He remained in the flat for twenty-four hours, but went to the bank the next afternoon. We alerted Sandra, who phoned him about the proffered job. At first, he had growled, then seeing a means of bolstering his ego had asked her to go out with him that night. She had accepted, and he had paraded her like a prize about Tangier's better bars and restaurants, buying champagne and caviar. She had led him on, but rewarded him with only a single kiss when he became insistent at the door of the *pension*. At that point, two of our men walked up and watched until Johnson left angrily.

Over coffee the next afternoon, she told me we had dealt a smashing blow to his ego. Apparently, he believed devoutly in his masculinity, shedding mistresses, as he pointed out, when he tired of them. Further, he knew nothing about lesbianism and considered it a tool of warped writers or of statisticians seeking sensational material. When Sandra could get him off his own

plaints, she dwelt on Cookie's death and on the international scene. He had brightened momentarily, but then became even more morose, finding solace again in complaining about his outraged vanity.

But I had more fuel for her. After the police had released Strauss, he had collected his crew and paid them off. According to them, he had sworn revenge on the French, assuring them the *Deuxième Bureau* had killed Cookie as an example to contrabanders. He had termed it a senseless crime, for neither he nor any other contrabanders had worked or contemplated dealing with the rebels. The French had chosen him as an example, he said, because of his nationality. Consequently, he would have his revenge by using his Boche military background to harm France.

He drove immediately to Oujda, near the Algerian border, presumably to offer his services to the rebels. The next morning, he left his hotel, got into his car, and pressed the starter. Dynamite had detonated, killing him instantly. Similar explosions had frequently taken the lives of others whom the French considered renegades.

Later that day, a plane carrying twenty-six persons from Tangier to Paris disintegrated in a violent explosion over the Midi. Comprising twenty-two French industrialists and their air crew, the group had made a goodwill tour of Morocco under the auspices of the French and Moroccan governments. Although the French government urged caution, journalists had already attributed the wreck to Arab retribution for the mining of Strauss's boat and his execution. Their reports, printed by the more sensational French and British newspapers, quoted witnesses of the explosion and officials who had already found traces of sabotage in the wreckage.

Despite their protestations, according to Gomez, the French believed the plane was sabotaged by Algerian rebels. A large group of investigators had been despatched from Paris to interrogate Arabs employed locally by the French airline. We doubted that Strauss's fate had prompted the monstrous crime;

it was more likely the work of a lunatic section of Algerian terrorists. Nevertheless, we instructed our agents to circulate rumours to the contrary. Sandra could now tell Johnson that twenty-six innocent persons, as well as Strauss and Cookie, had died because of Strauss's smuggling arms to the Algerians. He could also contemplate, at her urging, the crushing of the Hungarian revolt by the Russian army and Nasser's pyrrhic victory in Egypt over Britain and France.

Although Johnson should have tired of Sandra's frequent comments on the international scene and on Arab vengeance, he persevered, taking her out both at lunch-time and in the evening. He still dwelt often on his wife's perfidy, but other problems of a graver nature seemed to beset him as he regularly lapsed into glowering silence and drummed his fingers on the table or bar. Finally, two nights later, he made a sturdy effort to revert to his normal jolly vulgarity, which Sandra countered with moroseness. As she told us later, he floundered about trying to appease her and eventually said:

'It's eleven o'clock – about time we ate. Are you hungry?'

'Not very, but I'd better nibble something.'

It was the right answer, for he grinned. 'Do you liked smoked salmon – Scottish, of course?'

'Mad about it, Stan.'

'And *Johannisberger* with it?'

'Surely no restaurant serves that combination?'

Her reply disconcerted him. 'But it's one of the great white wines of the world!'

'But hardly with smoked salmon. How did you find it in Tangier? You must be a magician, for I've seen nothing but local muck.'

Somewhat mollified, he said: 'I'm taking care of a friend's flat while he's away. He left me the salmon and *Johannisberger*.'

'I don't know whether I should . . .'

'Look, honey, these bars and restaurants are starting to bore me.'

She smiled. 'All right, but behave yourself.'

When he said he had to make a call, she followed him to the telephone and taped him dialling 42833, then saying in Spanish: 'Juanjo, I'm coming over now.'

He hung up and drove Sandra to the south-central outskirts of the city, losing her immediately because she could not read all the street signs. Seven minutes later, he drew up beside an apartment building, having two shops flanking its main entrance. One, an Arab food store, carried a large placard above its display window, advertising a cola drink; the other was a cobbler's, having a crude painting of a huge battered shoe on its display window.

They took the elevator to the fourth floor, where Johnson used a key to open 43. The lights were out and the flat empty, but Sandra smelt tobacco smoke. Comfortably furnished, the flat had one large room with a day-bed, several chairs, and a dining table, a small kitchen, a bathroom, and in the main room a door that Johnson said led to the owner's storeroom.

She almost had the door knob in her hand, when he told her curtly not to touch it. She affected pique at his bluntness, rapidly souring what he had hoped would be a pleasant interlude of unlimited scope. In the hope of restoring her good humour, he swiftly produced salmon, butter, brown bread, lemons, and a pepper mill, but gave up when she sneered at the *Johannisberger* and praised aquavit as the complementary beverage.

Before they left, she taped him dialling 46521 and saying in Spanish:

'O.K, Juanjo, five minutes.'

In his car, he apologised for his bad temper, but she did not relent until they arrived at her *pension*, where she granted him a chaste kiss.

The next morning in Gomez's office, Sandra told him, a member of the surveillance teams called Riley, and me about the flat Johnson had taken her to.

Gomez turned to Riley: 'Well?'

He nodded. 'It's the one on Delgado. Shall I drive her there?'
'Go ahead,' I said.

Gomez and I smiled at each other and shook hands.

'So?' he said.

'After confirmation, case the building. They must have two flats. The guard clears out when Johnson phones and returns when Johnson signals his departure by phone. We'll have to take a flat there, and I'll leave it to you.'

We discussed the case until Sandra returned, smiling.

'That's it,' he said.

Gomez told me the next day that flat 43 was rented to a Juan José Tellez, a single man, about whom he had no information. The telephone number, 46521, was listed in the directory in the name of Francisco Vago, who had flat 65 in the same building. Again, Gomez knew nothing about him.

The only vacant flat on the third, fourth, or fifth floors was 31, from which we had little chance of directly bugging 43. But Gomez said an English electronics expert, Jack Sullivan, lived below 43. Sleeping during the days, he worked at night for one of the big radio relay firms in Tangier. After considerable digging, Gomez learned Sullivan operated in his flat one of the main transmitting stations used by Tangier contrabanders to communicate with their boats. His cover for this illegal activity was his amateur broadcasting licence.

Gomez pointed out that having a ham operator below gave Johnson cover for any communication he might have with Moscow. Presumably, he must have a set for high-speed transmission, which the Moroccan authorities would attribute to Sullivan's transmitter if they overheard and traced it to the building.

In the two years Sullivan had rented the flat, according to Gomez, he had lived with a succession of English mistresses, the last one having left three weeks ago. Gomez suggested we take 31 and install an attractive woman agent.

'Hell, we haven't much time,' I protested. 'How long before

he tumbles he's got the easiest lay in Tangier down the corridor?'

'Any other ideas?'

I shrugged. 'Go ahead. Have you passed this on to Grant?'

'He arrives tonight.'

'Damn! He'll be a bloody nuisance, but he has to take charge sometime.'

'He said you're still the boss. You fade out after you get into that room.'

I got up. 'Don't rush it. Might be nothing there but counterfeit traveller's cheques or a collection of pornography.'

'Would you make a book on that?' grinned Gomez.

'Hell no!' I snorted, leaving him.

Although the woman agent moved into the flat the next day, we had to await Sullivan's appreciation of his stroke of luck. I conferred with Grant for the first time the following day, and he approved of our plans. In the evening, I went to Sam Wright's bar and paid scant attention to his gossip about the sexual quirks of some of Tangier's residents. As he piled one half-truth on another, he drifted eventually to the subject of Joe Lesnick. I had contented myself with chuckles and affirmative grunts, but felt required to say:

'Surely you can't find much wrong with him?'

'You're right; he's mad keen. Thank God, some of us are left! Hell, that reminds me. He was in earlier – just before you arrived. I'll be damned if he didn't tell me he has a brother in the American air force.'

'Oh yeah? Where?'

'Morocco. He's just arrived on one of the bases, according to Lesnick.'

Somehow, I forced myself to finish my drink slowly and to change the subject. When I left minutes later, I told him I would be back in a couple of hours after I had eaten. I went to a nearby hotel, where telephone booths offered some privacy. But it was too late now for caution: I had to act. I dialled Grant's number.

When he answered, I said: 'It's Oscar. I'm going in right now.'

'Why?' he barked.

'Mike's brother's arrived.'

He was silent, then said: 'Go ahead. We'll cover you from outside. By yourself?'

'No, I'll take Harry.'

After telling me Johnson was with Sandra in a restaurant, he hung up. I phoned Cox, whose cover name was Harry, telling him where to meet me and what to bring. Twenty minutes later – just after nine o'clock – Cox and I were in flat 31 with the woman agent.

'Get down the corridor,' I said to her, 'and make sure Sullivan's out.'

She returned shortly and nodded. 'I think he is.'

'We're going in,' I said, 'then up to 43. Somewhere in the stuff we sent here is a walkie-talkie, two pair of receiver-spectacles, a tape recorder, and a tape marked "X". Please get them. When we go in, you'll stand in the corridor with the walkie-talkie.'

When she brought the items, I handed one spectacle frame to Cox and pocketed the other. Threading the tape on to a spool of the tape recorder, I tested it twice for timing and volume. I placed the recorder near the telephone, then dialled 42833. When someone said *sì*, I pushed the play back button of the recorder and held a small speaker to the mouthpiece of the telephone. Over it came Johnson's voice saying in Spanish.

'Juanjo, I'm coming over now.'

I immediately cut the telephone connection and said to Cox: 'Let's go.'

Cox and the woman followed me to No. 33, Cox carrying a package. I found the door double-locked and had to pick the lock. Cox stood at one end of the corridor, and the woman at the other. Five minutes later, the door swung open, and I turned on the overhead light, Cox following me inside. We checked the flat and found it empty. From the package, Cox removed a small

electronic device with attached earphones. Without a word, we moved a table to the centre of the room, Cox clambering on to it. By stretching, he could reach the ceiling with the bug. I handed him a stool, and he stepped on to it. He put on the earphones and held the bug against the ceiling.

I went out to the terrace and looked up. The flat above was dark. I examined the other terraces and the neighbourhood below me. Nothing stirred. After five minutes, I returned and gestured questioningly at Cox. He shook his head. I waved him off the stool, and we returned it and the table to their normal positions, then turned off the light.

'Take the bug back to the girl,' I said. 'I'll go up when you get back.'

From the parcel, I took a thirty-foot length of hemp rope with a rubber-covered hook spliced to one end. Out on the terrace, I swung the hook upwards to the terrace above. It thudded against the upper railing, but did not catch until the third throw. I tested the hook's hold by pulling the rope strongly. When Cox returned, I climbed up as he held the rope.

On the upper terrace, I crept towards the opened door leading to the darkened flat. After listening for a minute, I went back to the railing and disengaged the hook. I hauled up more rope and dropped the hook to Cox after passing it around the rail. He attached the hook to the rail of the lower terrace and made the fall fast.

He joined me, and we went into the flat, a small torch illuminating our way. I turned on a table lamp, and we went to the door Sandra had described.

It was locked. Ten minutes later, I still had not picked it, and Cox relieved me. Several more minutes passed. Suddenly the door bell rang.

I turned off the light, and we ran to the terrace. Pausing, ready to climb over, we could hear someone picking the lock. The door opened and shut immediately, then the overhead light went on. Lesnick stood there, an automatic pistol in his hand.

We crouched down on either side of the door, but he never

bothered to search the flat or the terrace. Instead, he went to the locked door and worked on its lock. Another five minutes passed, as he too had no success.

Then the front door edged open. A stranger entered and noiselessly closed the door. He carried a pistol with an attached silencer. Lesnick sensed something and whirled, his right hand darting to his belt. The stranger fired. Lesnick groaned, grabbed his chest, and fell to the floor.

The stranger walked over and pocketed Lesnick's pistol, which had fallen from his belt. He bent down and rolled Lesnick on his back.

I nodded to Cox, and he followed me through the door. We were beside the stranger before he knew it. I chopped him across the neck with the edge of my hand, and Cox grabbed the pistol with both hands. The stranger grunted and fell over Lesnick. I hauled him off and kicked him hard in the head.

We carried him to the bed, where Cox started to tie him up and blindfold him with strips torn from the sheets. I went back to Lesnick. He was still alive, but coughing blood, obviously from a lung wound. I knelt beside him and lifted him to a sitting position, ensuring that none of his blood splashed on me.

His eyes opened and gradually focused on me.

'Why . . . Robert?' he faltered. 'We're . . . probably . . . on . . . the . . . same . . . team.'

'I didn't do it,' I choked. 'I got the bastard who did.'

He tried to grin, but coughed up more blood, his chin falling to his chest.

Then his head came up again, and his eyes found me.

'Don't . . . know . . . what . . . you . . . are . . . but . . . stop . . . my . . . brother . . . on . . . Sidi . . . Slimey . . .'

He coughed again, then said more strongly:

'Tell the British consul or American security . . .'

He trailed off and would have fallen but for my grasp on his shoulder.

'Joe,' I said, 'what's his name?'

He did not reply, so I shook him roughly.

'What's his name?' I repeated.

But it was too late. Cox stood beside me. I looked up at him through watery eyes, and he shook his head. I let Lesnick's body fall to the floor and stumbled to the bathroom, where I washed my face. A minute sufficed, and I returned to the room. Cox, who had just finished lashing the killer, looked at me inquiringly. I shrugged.

Picking up the telephone, I dialled Grant's number. When he answered the first ring, I told him of Lesnick's death. He swore, then barked:

'Any ideas?'

'Yeah, a real beauty. You can frame Johnson for the killing after Sandra gets him here. Pretend you're cops, and he'll break.'

'Jesus, chum! That's great.'

'Yeah, isn't it.'

'Did you get into the file room?'

'No, you'll have to break in or get Johnson to open it for you.'

'All right, sit tight. I'll be there in twenty minutes.'

He hung up, and I turned to Cox.

'Let's have a drink.'

We found a bottle of scotch and poured two strong drinks. I tossed mine off and went to the terrace window, staring out into the darkness. Cox was working on the lock. I looked out again into the night, puzzling over some of Lesnick's remarks.

Suddenly a voice rasped in Spanish:

'Get your hands on top of your heads and don't move!'

Chapter 15

I obeyed, silently cursing my stupidity in forgetting the second guard.

'Let's see your faces,' said the same voice, 'but slowly.'

Turning, I saw a nondescript, slight man, a pistol with an attached silencer in his hand. He aimed it at a point between Cox and me. To test him, I moved one foot slightly. The pistol covered me.

'Stay where you are!' he barked, then edging slowly towards the bed, checked the identity and condition of the figure there.

'All right, you, turn round,' he ordered Cox. 'Stand a metre from the wall and lean on it with your hands above your head.'

When Cox complied, he turned to me, gesturing with his pistol. 'Get over there and do the same. But stay two metres from him.'

As we leaned against the wall, he searched us, removing Lesnick's pistol from Cox's hip pocket. I carried a pocket knife, but he ignored it. Then prodding Cox with his pistol, he snapped:

'Get over there and untie my friend.'

Cox went over, loosened the knots and blindfold, and stepped back. I stole a glance at our captor, but he ordered me brusquely to face the wall.

'Get a pot of water from the kitchen,' he said to Cox, 'and don't forget I'm watching you.'

From the corner of my eye, I watched Cox return with the water and pour it over the figure on the bed. The man groaned, then slowly sat up when our captor called him. He staggered to his feet and lurched into the kitchen, from where I could hear

the sound of running water. On orders, Cox returned to the wall and leaned against it.

When the first guard came back from the kitchen, he conferred in whispers with the other, but I heard nothing. Suddenly the second guard barked:

‘What the hell were you two doing here?’

‘Give us a break, mister,’ I whined. ‘My pal and I were just looking round. We meant no . . .’

‘How did you come in?’

‘By rope from the terrace below. Give us . . .’

‘Shut up.’

One of them went to the terrace and returned, saying:

‘They did.’

‘It’s the truth,’ I sobbed. ‘You’re not going to do anything . . .’

‘What part of Spain are you from?’

‘Mexico,’ I faltered. ‘We’re just seamen on the beach here. Please, mister . . .’

‘Mexican, my ass!’ snapped one. ‘His Spanish is good, but get that American accent. They’re no bums; they blitzed me expertly. What about the other one? He hasn’t said anything. Hey, you, what part of Spain are you from?’

‘I’m Mexican too,’ blubbered Cox, then sobbed.

I had to say something in the hope they would ignore him, for his accent was unquestionably English.

‘Please, mister, he’s a little simple. Don’t hurt him.’

‘Shut up,’ they barked simultaneously, then spoke together in whispers.

Eventually, one said: ‘We’re leaving. One of us will go first, and you two in the centre. No tricks. We’re both armed.’

‘What do we do with Lesnick?’ asked the other guard.

‘Leave him; we’ve got nothing to put him in. It’s a bloody shame because these two bastards could carry him.’

They barked more orders, and Cox and I went through the door, the first guard leading the way to the stairs. When we reached the third floor, I sobbed, then moaned:

‘Please, mister, we’re . . .’

'Shut up!' exploded the guard behind me, his pistol jabbing me in the back. 'Any more of that, and you'll get hurt.'

Whether this exchange was heard by the woman agent on watch in the corridor, I did not know. The noise of our descent should have alerted her, and my plea identified us under the dim lights of the stairway. Actually, our predicament was not desperate, for Grant would arrive within minutes. Other agents on the ground had covered our climb to the fourth floor terrace, but I did not know if they also watched the front of the building.

Outside, the guard led us to a van and hustled us into its dark interior, locking the door. They got in the front compartment and drove off. A partition blocked off the front from the rear. I tried the inside door handle unsuccessfully. By holding it, I could stand and peer through a tiny, dirty glass window in the door. We were driving through Tangier streets I could not identify; traffic was scarce.

Turning to Cox, I asked: 'How's your heart?'

'As good as can be expected. What the bloody hell . . .?'

'Find the leads to the rear lights and cut them,' I interrupted. 'Here's a knife. But don't short them until I give you the word.' I paused, looking out of the window, then continued: 'If your heart's O.K., the amperage shouldn't kill you. This van's too small to need a heavier charge. Also pray the front and rear lights are on the same fuse.'

'You plan to keep on looking out of the window?'

'No, I'll short one side.'

He laughed. 'O.K. But let's do it now while we're still in the city.'

'I'm no hero either, chum. But I think we're being followed by a car without lights. I've had a few glimpses of it.'

'Hell, let's do ourselves a favour! If you're right, it'd still be better to take these bastards in the city.'

I thought about his advice. 'Hey, there it is again! No, I want to find out where they're taking us!'

'I don't! It's probably a cliff with the sea below. Remember Lesnick!'

I said nothing. They had driven through Tangier into the country. Then I caught a glimpse of a beach to my right. Cox might be correct: we were on the road leading east from Tangier, where after several miles cliffs overlooked the sea. Then I saw quite clearly a darkened car following us.

I turned to him. 'Got the wires?'

'Yeah, they're all cut. Come over here, and I'll show you how to short the ones on the right.'

He guided my hands to the severed ends of four wires, one pair of which probably led to the turn-indicator light.

'I did the lot,' he explained. 'We don't know which is which. Just splice them all together. Let's be smart and do it now.'

I looked out again. 'That car's about fifty yards behind. I can see it in the moonlight.'

'Great! But where the hell are we?'

'Near those cliffs.'

'Jesus, don't be a fool! Do it now!'

'O.K. When the lights short out, they'll stop and come round here. As soon as they unlock the doors, you barrel out on the left, and I'll take the right. Undo the bolts now at the top and bottom on your side. I'll take the door handle.'

'Now?'

'Yeah!'

I sat down and twisted the wires together, swearing at the pain and burning my fingers. Suddenly, the driver braked. Presumably, the headlights had gone out when the fuse blew. The van stopped with a squeal of tyres. I scrambled up and joined Cox at the door, one hand on the handle and the other flat against the door. The front doors slammed. The two guards walked to the back of the van and whispered below us.

Suddenly, the key clicked in the lock. When the handle moved, I snapped:

'Now!'

The doors flew open, and I hurtled out on to one of them. I caught him with a knee in the face, and he dropped. A gun fired.

I landed on him and the road, jarring myself. Jumping on him, I grabbed his hair and slammed his head on the asphalt. He went limp. I rolled away and up, dodging round the corner of the van.

Then two headlights went on, blinding me. Three shots blasted out, two from the direction of the headlights. I crouched by the side of the van, trying to see. A figure stumbled by, waving a pistol. It was the second guard.

I chopped it out of his hand, then whirled him round and kned him in the groin. He fell away, his head thudding against the road, and was still. I grabbed the gun and ran to the front of the van.

We had disposed temporarily of the guards, but I wanted to know the identity of those who had followed us in the car. I felt they were allies, but they had fired shots. No one stirred. The headlights beamed down each side of the van, missing me in the shadows ahead of it. Behind me, the surf broke on rocks below, and a fresh breeze rattled the palmetto scrub beside the road. It played over the clammy shirt stuck to my back. I shivered and knuckled some sweat out of my eyes. One thigh and a shoulder started to ache from my jolting fall to the road, and my fingers burned from fusing the wires. Still nothing.

Then I heard someone floundering through the scrub ahead of me. I brought the pistol up, but the light of the half-moon showed nothing.

Suddenly a voice rang out in English: 'Robert, John, it's us. Are you all right?'

It was Rayburn. I whirled from his voice and circled off the road to the back of the van. Before revealing myself, I wanted to know if the two guards were still senseless. They were, and I stepped into the beams of the headlights.

'I'm O.K!' I shouted. 'Cox!'

'Here I am,' he said behind me.

Rayburn ran up with three other men, agents whom I did not know. We examined the two guards. They were dead from bullet wounds.

'Throw them in the back of the van,' I said to Rayburn, 'and

follow us. I'm going to my villa on the Old Mountain Road . . . I'm beat. Will someone fix the rear lights and fuses in the van.'

Minutes later, we drove off with Cox at the wheel.

'What happened to you?' I asked.

'When we went out on top of them, the guy I hit fired wildly. It must have struck your man. I tried to get his gun, but he rolled away, snapping a shot at me. I got the hell off the road and Rayburn's boys shot him.'

I laughed weakly. 'I thought I'd creamed the two of them. Hell, they were both dying when I slugged them.'

'Don't let it destroy any illusions, chum. We're bloody lucky.'

At the villa, I rang the bell, and a servant showed the six of us into the house. I told him to bring a bowl of ice and go home. After he left, we poured drinks. Several minutes later, we went outside to reconnoitre, but the neighbourhood was quiet. We carried the two bodies inside and locked them in the deep freeze.

I told the others to rejoin Grant and advise him we had two more bodies to dispose of. When they left, I went inside and poured another drink.

Shortly after midnight, the door-bell rang. I sped upstairs to the window overlooking the entrance, but relaxed when I saw Grant and Sandra standing beside the van. Going to the gate, I let them in.

Grant was smiling grimly. 'Turn off that light, Robert. We've got another customer for your deep freeze.'

I gaped at him. 'Christ! Who?'

'Lesnick. I want to keep them all literally on ice until tomorrow. It'll tidy up a few loose ends. Most providential, that deep freeze. Got room for many more?'

'You may find it amusing,' I snapped, 'but I want those stiffs out of here.'

'They'll be out tomorrow night; it's the best we can do.'

After I turned out the light, two men carried in the body of Lesnick, as though they supported a drunk. Opening the door

of the deep freeze, I tried to avoid looking at the two bodies, but one of them glowered at me with staring eyes and teeth bared in a snarl. Undaunted, Grant inspected them closely, then supervised the installation of Lesnick's corpse.

'Don't let him slump,' he cautioned the bearers. 'He'll be easier to remove if he's frozen standing. Like the other two . . . Yes, that's it.'

The two men left, and Grant and I joined Sandra in the salon, where I poured drinks. Grant took his and saluted me, saying:

'Here's to your improvisation, Robert. Great . . .'

'We can do without your macabre wit,' I interrupted.

'Nothing macabre about it,' he protested. 'You improvised skilfully on this assignment, and I wanted to toast you.'

'Then I'm finished?'

'Not quite. You and I have a date with an American air force plane at the airport at eight o'clock. We'll try to sort out this Lesnick thing with their security people in Rabat.'

'Why not Gidi Slimaine?'

His eyebrows shot up. 'Why that base?'

'It's where Serge Lesnick is stationed.'

He started. 'How the hell do you know?'

'Before he died, Joe Lesnick said: "Stop my brother on Sidi Slimey." I never had a chance to tell you.'

'Where's your telephone? I have to straighten this out.'

As he started to dial, I grinned at Sandra. 'How did it go?'

'Messy. But let him tell you.'

'Did Johnson . . .'

'Please, Robert. I'm fed up with the whole rotten business.'

With a grimace, she added: 'He revels in it. I suppose it's a good story. Don't let me spoil it.'

'O.K. doll. Here's to us.'

Grant returned, smiling happily. 'Well, that narrows it down. Now, Robert, I'll bring you up to date.'

Sandra yawned. 'I'm exhausted. Can I use the same bed, Robert?'

'Sure.'

She left us, and Grant said: 'I'll be staying too. Well, Robert, what you missed . . .'

Grant and several other agents arrived at the building minutes after the guards had driven Cox and me away. Satisfied by other agents of ours that Rayburn and his men would release us, Grant went to flat 43. He found the setting perfect for his plan, though he had to substitute another pistol for the weapon that had killed Lesnick, the guards having taken it.

Earlier, he had given an agent a note for Sandra, telling her to get Johnson to the flat but not to accompany him. Such a manoeuvre presented no problems, for Grant knew Johnson would alert the guard by telephone of his imminent arrival. Since Grant planned to be in the flat when Johnson telephoned, an unanswered call, he knew, would worry Johnson. Any excuse by Sandra to cover her joining him later would satisfy Johnson, who would want to solve immediately the puzzle of the unanswered telephone.

Grant then initiated his plan by telling the agent by telephone to deliver the note. After reading it in the lavatory, Sandra returned to Johnson's table and said she wanted to drink a bottle of *Johannisberger* with or without smoked salmon. Scenting a conquest, he agreed immediately, and with an arch look, she said she first had to fetch something from her room.

He left her and phoned. In the flat, Grant, so he said, rubbed his hands happily when the phone rang. Back in the Madison, a puzzled Johnson rejoined Sandra at the table. Claiming a sudden business matter requiring his attention, he said he would drop her at the *pension* and pick her up in half an hour. She agreed, and they left the bar. When Johnson dropped her outside the *pension*, she went to her room.

Meanwhile, Johnson drove to the building where Grant awaited him and going to the rear, looked up at the unlighted flat. Then he went to flat 65 and obtaining no response to the bell, continued to 43. He opened the door and turned on the light.

He froze when he saw Lesnick's body, his face white and his mouth open. He shut the door and leaned against it, closing his eyes and letting his chin fall to his chest. Then pulling himself together, he walked slowly and stiffly towards the body.

Crouched on the terrace, Grant signalled by walkie-talkie to an agent outside in the corridor. As Johnson knelt beside Lesnick's body, the agent rang the bell. Johnson started and turned to the door, his face sick with fear. Then the agent pretended noisily to pick the lock. Johnson grabbed the pistol beside Lesnick's body and straightened up, facing the door.

On the terrace, Grant stood up and photographed Johnson through a window. With the flash of the bulb, Johnson pivoted towards the window and pulled the trigger.

'Dummy rounds,' drawled Grant in French. 'You're under arrest.'

Johnson pulled the trigger again, then dropped the gun, his hands going to his face. Grant entered with two men, telling them to search Johnson while he opened the door for the third agent.

'He's clean,' one of the men said in French.

'Take him outside and fire the gun,' ordered Grant.

Two men hustled Johnson to the terrace and while gripping his hand, forced him to fire a pistol with an attached silencer. It popped into the night, and they brought Johnson back to Grant.

'That winds it up!' snapped Grant to Johnson. 'We have a photograph of you holding a gun over the body, and a paraffin test will show you fired one recently. Irregular, perhaps, but good enough to get you thirty years from an Arab tribunal. Why did you do it?'

'I didn't kill him,' Johnson said hopelessly.

'Why did you come here?'

'A friend owns the flat. He's away from Tangier, and I take care of it.'

Grant exploded: 'You're the cleaning man, eh? Think of a better one. We should have Juan José Tellez here soon. He was in the flat tonight, according to the neighbours.'

'I didn't kill . . .'

Pointing at the body, Grant demanded: 'Who is he?'

'I don't know. I've never seen him before.'

'You're lying. Your papers say you're Canadian; so do his. Why did you do it? And what did you come back for?'

'I can prove where I was all evening. I didn't . . .'

'Well, why come here. I'll wager we'll find your prints all over the place.'

'A girl . . .'

Grant snorted: 'Rubbish! Why do you come here? You haven't denied we'll find your prints here. Why?'

Johnson said nothing, shaking his head and staring at the floor.

'What's behind that door?' Grant barked. 'We can't get it open.'

Johnson's eyes followed Grant's pointing finger, and he replied with more feeling: 'I don't suppose you can.'

'What's inside? More bodies?'

Johnson smiled feebly. 'You might put it that way.'

'Are there, now? Pierre, get an axe!'

'Don't,' said Johnson more strongly. 'You're French?'

'Yes, but . . .'

'Are these other men French too?'

'Yes, we're the French squad.'

Johnson stared fixedly at Grant. 'How many people outside this room know about the body?'

Grant grinned wickedly. 'No one. We haven't reported yet. We found the body just before you came back, but you're not bribing your way out . . .'

'This is no bribe,' Johnson interrupted. 'It's a deal. But I make it with French intelligence, not coppers.'

'Go on.'

'No, the deal is with French intelligence. Get them here, and I'll give them the biggest bonus they've had for years.'

'It's inside that door, is it?'

Johnson nodded. 'Don't break it down. The files are booby-trapped.'

Grant walked slowly to the door and back, then paused in front of Johnson to stare at him. 'You can make the deal with me.'

'Then you're . . .'

'Most French policemen are in Tangier.'

Then Grant barked: 'Open that bloody door!'

Johnson looked at him and getting up, walked to a light switch, which he slid upwards off a bracket. It came away trailing wires and exposed a lock. When Johnson inserted a key and turned it, an electric motor whined for several seconds and stopped. Next, he went to the door and opened it with another key. Switching on a light, he motioned Grant inside.

The room contained a filing cabinet, about six feet long, a radio transmitter and other electronic gear, two chairs, and a table, upon which were stacked six toy typewriters. Grant opened a filing drawer at random and took out a paper folder. It held a dozen sheets of paper, covered with notes.

'Christ, Russian?' he exploded.

'What did you expect?' asked Johnson. 'The files of the Ku Klux Klan?'

'Who the hell are you?'

'Isn't that obvious?' smiled Johnson. 'Now I'll give you my side of the deal. You'll never be able to read those files. No one can, except me. You get rid of the body out there, and I'll interpret the files. But not all at once.'

'Let's see the file on Carlos Serrano,' snapped Grant, 'and the ones on Serge and Joe Lesnick too!'

It staggered Johnson. 'Who are you?' he faltered.

'Isn't that obvious?' grated Grant. 'Get those files!'

His face ashen, Johnson opened two drawers and removed three folders.

'Here they are,' he said, handing them to Grant with a shaking hand.

Grant turned to the agent, whom he had earlier called Pierre, 'Can you read them?'

After examining one file, the agent said: 'I can't make much sense of it. Ninety per cent of the words are in clear Russian, but the other ten per cent are too cryptic. It's a personal code, probably something a trained man can remember. We could break it eventually.'

'Translate the one on Serrano!' barked Grant to Johnson.

Ten minutes later, Grant said: 'Now, tell me what you know about the nuclear explosion on the American base. How were the Lesnicks planning it?'

Johnson stared at him. 'You know about that too?'

'Stop stalling!'

Johnson said Moscow had drawn up the plan more than a year ago. His role was minor, he claimed, for he was required only to assist the two brothers, who were acting on orders directly from Moscow. Serge would identify himself to Johnson by some 35 mm. strip prints of children playing. The shots were in sequence, showing the children acting out a charade. Serge held the first three, and Johnson the next trio. How they planned the explosion, he did not know, but he expected Serge's arrival shortly.

'You're lying!' snapped Grant. 'Serge Lesnick is already in Morocco.'

'I don't know anything about it. He hasn't come to me yet. Perhaps he doesn't have to, since he works only with Joe.'

Thirty minutes later, Grant was satisfied with Johnson's cooperation and assured him of the full protection of the French I. S., provided he continued his work under their direction. When Johnson protested, pointing to the existence of the two guards, Tellez and Vago, Grant, who had been alerted by one of Rayburn's men, said they were dead.

At that, Johnson stared at Grant. 'I understand a lot now.'

'I expect you do,' Grant grinned. 'But you're not out of it yet. We'll keep the bodies literally on ice until tomorrow night. By

then you will have interpreted all those files. When we're satisfied you have nothing more for us, we'll bring the bodies back here. Then you'll discover them and get Serrano to help you dispose of them. You can tell him the two guards discovered Lesnick, and the three of them shot it out. Later, you'll move two of my men in as guards here and another to help you in the bank. Got it?'

'What happens to me eventually?'

'You'll be well paid and you can still fiddle through your bank. The only change is that you'll be working for us rather than for the GRU.'

'And when they find out?'

'We'll retire you to a nice office in Paris where you can advise us. Or maybe you can go to Tahiti or Martinique with your loot. But we'll protect you. That I guarantee.'

Johnson shrugged. 'I don't know what your guarantee's worth, but I haven't much choice.'

'You have none!'

'... And that's it,' Grant concluded. 'Let's get to bed. We've only a few hours before we have to be at the airport. You have an extra bed, haven't you?'

'Yes.'

'Well, lead on.'

On the stairs, he said: 'The windows and doors are wired in case anyone tries to break in?'

'Yes. I hook the system up every night. Why? Do you expect company?'

'Perhaps. Wake me; I've got a gun.'

I looked at him suspiciously, but he said nothing more before he shut the door of his bedroom.

When the alarm buzzer went, I jumped out of bed and checked the signal box. Number six light glowed red, indicating the kitchen window. I awakened Grant, and we went downstairs. It was 4 a.m.

From the kitchen door, we saw a shadowy figure in the window.

'Let him come in,' whispered Grant. 'It'll save trouble. Turn on the light when I signal.'

Sounds of sawing came from the window. Eventually, the figure wrenched a bar away and clambered in. Grant nudged me, and I turned on the light, ducking to the floor.

A man stood in front of the window, blinded and snarling. His hand dove to his belt.

Grant's gun roared, and the man crumpled to the floor. We walked warily towards him, but saw the bullet wound in the forehead.

'Into the deep freeze with him,' said Grant unemotionally. 'And that really winds it up.'

I glared at him, but he said nothing as we carried the body to the deep freeze. Back in the kitchen, Grant said:

'Put that bar back in position. We'll have to fake it for the servants until I can have a proper one put in tomorrow night.'

'You do it!' I snapped. 'I'm going to check the dogs.'

When I returned to the house, Grant said casually: 'What was it? A bitch in heat?'

I started. 'Christ, you can't be right all the time! How did you guess?'

'An old burglar's trick. Did he lower the bitch on a rope?'

'Yes. I just reversed the process – much to the dogs' disgust. Now, who the hell was it you shot? You expected him.'

'Johnson warned me. It's the janitor in the building where we found the files. He was the third guard. We blazed a trail up here, and he took the bait. Presumably, he went back to town and got the bitch. If he had any pals, my men outside would have alerted us by now. Before I go to bed, I'll tell them everything's O.K.'

I looked at him disgustedly. 'You would have shot him whether he went for the gun or not?'

'You're god damned right I would have!' snapped Grant. 'That's why I didn't warn you!'

Chapter 16

The next morning, Grant and I were with several American security officers on the strategic bomber base at Sidi Slimaine.

'Mr. Smith,' said one of them to me, 'here are all the data and pictures of men over thirty-five who handle nuclear weapons. We call them variously weapons technicians, weapons maintenance men, and munitions specialists. You say Lesnick is forty-four, but the oldest we've got in those categories is forty-two.'

'If you don't mind,' I said, 'let me have a look at the picture of everyone handling the bombs regardless of age.'

'Why?' said Grant.

'A theory.'

When they gave me a thick pile of paper, I leafed through it, tossing to one side five sheets headed by photographs, then said: 'Look at these five.'

After examining them, someone said: 'So?'

'Those five men,' I said, 'are similar facially and physically. With make-up, Joe Lesnick could have passed for any one of them. That's probably how Serge planned to get him on the base. I have to take your word, of course, that one man could not engineer the explosion. So it explains why Serge needed an accomplice.'

Grant whistled. 'Neat. Are they all in the same category?'

One of the security men examined the documents. 'Four are weapons maintenance men; the other isn't. Incidentally, the four have arrived here during the past three months. I guess we can concentrate there.'

After several minutes, the same man said: 'We've got three over thirty-five. One enlisted in 1940, and the others in '41. What do you make of the photographs?'

'He could be any one of them,' I replied after examining the pictures. 'When were they posted here?'

The silence was oppressive, and I went to a window and stared out at the runways.

Suddenly, someone said: 'All three came in ten days ago from the States. Let's order a medical inspection of all weapons maintenance men. Tell the doc to give them a standard physical, but to look especially for plastic surgery scars and for anyone who could be forty-four despite what his papers say.'

The other Americans agreed, and one man detailed orders into a telephone. When he finished, he said: 'We'll have him soon, but what do we do with him?'

'Perhaps it would be more important,' I said, 'to check back to find out who sent to this base Lesnick and the four men who look like his brother. Lesnick couldn't arrange it; he had help. He's a good catch, but the administrative officer somewhere might prove an even better one.'

The man who apparently was senior smiled: 'I thought of that. Don't worry; we'll get him. But what do we do with Lesnick when we trap him?'

While Grant and I remained silent, they discussed their problem. Eventually, they agreed they would probably uncover no evidence on which to convict Lesnick of a serious charge. They might accept Grant's word that Lesnick was a security risk and order his discharge from the service. All they could hope to prove was that he had masqueraded as an American citizen on enlistment, which was illegal, but having taken the oath of allegiance could now claim American nationality.

Only Lesnick could convict himself by signing a confession, a ridiculous prospect in view of his veteran status as a communist agent. Earlier, in the plane from Tangier, Grant had explained he could not jeopardize his sources by permitting them to give evidence in court that might convict Lesnick of spying. The

Americans had accepted Grant's position after checking with Washington.

'Hell,' said one, 'it's enough to uncover the bastard.'

They ordered coffee frequently, two hours passing before someone entered and threw a file on the desk of the senior official.

'There's your boy,' he said. 'According to the doctors, he has plastic surgery scars and could be forty-four. His name is Joseph Torrance. Now what?'

They discussed it, and eventually Grant broke in: 'Don't forget you promised you wouldn't blow our sources. I'm sure Mr Smith has some ideas on how to trap Lesnick.'

They turned to me.

'Would you be satisfied,' I asked, 'trapping him with a half-admission of his Canadian nationality and Spanish Civil War background? It's not good enough for a court of law, but it would back up our charges. If we satisfy you people, you can discharge him or post him to Greenland. If it doesn't work, you can start on another tack.'

'Sure,' said the senior official. 'How?'

'Run them all through a psychological test,' I replied, 'but have me present when you get to Torrance. You can mimeograph a questionnaire having an extra problem for Torrance, but blend it in well with the others so that he's not suspicious. Just ask him to pronounce a word incorporating "out". You could use "rout", "about", "tout".'

Someone laughed. 'Hell, I'd forgotten that trick of separating Canadians from Americans. O.K., let's do it.'

An hour later, I stood beside a table, at which the senior security man was posing as a psychologist. We both wore white smocks.

'Send in Torrance,' he said to an orderly.

The man who entered bore little resemblance to Joe Lesnick, and I had some doubts. He had a hard face and restless eyes, but was about four inches shorter than Joe and huskier. I affected indifference and went to the window, remaining there as

they worked through the first five questions.' Then the senior official said:

'Torrance, I want you to use the words you see in question six in different sentences. Now, the first one: "Tear"':

'If you tear your shirt, you have to mend it,' said Torrance.

' "Tout".'

'I saw the tout at the race-track.'

' "Tantrum".'

'The child had a tantrum.'

' "Rear".'

'The soldier went to the rear.'

' "Rout".'

'I rout the enemy platoon.'

Assured now, I stepped forward and barked in Spanish: 'All right, Lesnick, back to your quarters!'

Lesnick jumped up and turned smartly towards the door, then stopped in his tracks. He turned slowly to me, his face pale and his eyes glittering.

'What did you say, sir?' he croaked in English.

'If you didn't understand it, Lesnick,' I snapped in Spanish, 'why did you get up?'

He stood stiffly at attention and said levelly: 'I'm sorry sir, I don't understand you.'

The senior official rang a buzzer, and two of his associates entered to stand in front of the door.

'O.K, Lesnick . . .' started the senior official.

'My name's Torrance, sir,' interrupted Lesnick.

'Yeah, I know. O.K, Torrance, go along with those two.'

When they left, the senior official turned to me. 'Thanks, you proved your points, but I guess that's all we'll ever get out of him.'

On the plane back to Tangier, Grant relaxed as we gradually drifted conversationally from the case to less bizarre topics. When the pilot started his approach from the west over Tangier's Atlantic beach, we commented on the magnificent stretch

of sand and the treacherous waters immediately offshore. I felt I had lulled him into a frame of mind where he might reply truthfully and unthinkingly, though earlier he must have noted my tenseness and been suspicious. While talking casually about the beach, he would be conjecturing, like me, about the pilot during those swift seconds before we touched down.

So I said quietly:

'How much did Joe Lesnick want?'

'Ten thousand pounds ...' he replied, then stopped and turned to me, his eyes narrowed and fierce.

'You rotten son-of-a-bitch!' I snapped. 'You turned him down and enlisted me for five hundred.'

'We couldn't trust him!' he spat out. 'He'd have sold his own mother ...'

'His brother in this case,' I interrupted, 'plus a whole communist apparatus. The price wasn't outrageous. Working on his own, he arrived simultaneously with me at the file room. I had your organization and electronic gadgetry behind me; he had nothing.'

'But his greed!'

'So what! You make me want to puke!'

We said nothing more either there or during the drive to Tangier and parted with curt nods. I drank heavily that night and watched with disgust the removal of the four bodies and the installation of the bar in the kitchen window.

Sandra woke me early next morning by telephone:

'Robert, I'm leaving in a few minutes by plane to Git.'

'Hell, Sandra, can't we even say good-bye properly?'

'I've got a week's leave. I thought of spending it in Torremolinos.'

'Meet the ferry in Gib. I'll be on it!'

'See you,' she laughed gaily.

